

PHOTOGRAPHING Jewish Weddings

*A Complete Handbook
for Professionals*



Stan Turkel

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Dedication

Being a wedding photographer is very rewarding. I get to experience and be a part of some of the most joyful and special days in the lives of so many families. As I photograph each wedding, I am filled with tremendous gratitude to be given a role in the lives of so many hundreds, if not thousands, of people.

The joy and tears that come to me under the chuppah as blessings are recited, while looking into the faces

of mothers and fathers watching their children start their lives together as a couple, is a true gift to me. For this, I thank all of the families who have entrusted me with this wonderful task to photograph their children's wedding.

On the other hand, being married to a wedding photographer is no picnic either. I think of all those times when I just couldn't be somewhere, because I was shooting a

wedding that day. My dear wife of thirty-five years has never once complained or made me feel guilty. She always understands and supports me, encouraging me to stay well and pace myself. Thank you, my dear, for all those foot massages after a ten-hour shoot, and listening to my stories of how the wedding went at all hours of the night. You made it easy for me to continue to do what I love so much. Thank you.

Acknowledgments

There are several people I need to acknowledge, and I am sad to say that not all of them are alive today. As a young boy I attended Camp Airy in the mountains of Western Maryland. There I met Greta, who ran the photo department. At the age of seven, I was introduced to the magic of the darkroom, and she taught me so much in those few weeks of camp. Thank you, Greta.

My brother Ben comes next. I am so glad he is still part of my life, now and, hopefully, for many years to come.

Ben showed me the wonders of the Polaroid Land camera and the magic of instant photography. Every holiday, out would come the camera and the magic would begin. At a young age, I would travel with Ben to so many places, never without a camera. Thanks, Ben.

Photographing Jewish weddings is a two-person job, and for me, that

other person is Alona. As a team, we work miracles during the day. None of it could happen without her. The ability to communicate with just a nod or a look takes years of working together to gain, but Alona and I have had a special bond since her early days working with me. Plus, no one can get fifty people to line up for a group shot like Alona. Thank you for your hard work, your patience for putting up with me and, most of all, for that great smile that makes every bride "light up for me."

Writing is very different from photography. You don't need grammar and punctuation in your photos, which is good, or else I'd really be in trouble. Gali, thanks for helping with the editing and adding your perspective to this work. It was great photographing your wedding, and it's great having you here with us.

It's great when you find a new friend. It's even better when you

find one that works in your market and industry but doesn't compete with you. In Jeffrey, I found a great friend and a great videographer who has been a constant companion as we end up working most weddings together. Thank you for your humor, encouragement, and working with me side by side in our special way. You truly are a great friend, and when I know you are working the same wedding with me, it makes my day.

Who would have thought to put together a book on photographing Jewish weddings? After meeting with Barbara in Tampa and a brief conversation with Craig of Amherst Media, here we are. Thank you for seeing the need for this type of book and taking it all the way. I look forward to sharing my ideas with you both on future endeavors, and I look forward to a growing relationship.

About the Author

As I look back on my life, with all of its twists and turns, I realize that I was destined to be a photographer of Jewish weddings. Being a first-generation American and the child of Holocaust survivors made a mark on me. You see, I grew up without grandparents, with hardly any relatives at all, since all were lost during the war. What we did have were a handful of pictures that my parents were able to save and bring with them to the States. I understood, at a very young age, the importance of having family photos.

Like many children of Holocaust survivors, I ended up going to a Jewish Orthodox day school, not because we were Orthodox, but because the education granted to us was free thanks to a Jewish agency. I learned all about the Jewish Orthodox life, even though I was not.

At age thirteen, I had my bar mitzvah. Though my parents were not well off, they hired a photographer who gave me an album of pictures from my bar mitzvah. This was great, since I was the only one of us four children in the family who had this. Once again, I saw the impor-

tance of these life-cycle event images. So, at the age of thirteen, I bought my first camera with money from my bar mitzvah and started a lifelong hobby and profession.

After a few years and several careers, my experiences helped prepare me for my current love, photographing Jewish weddings and bar and bat mitzvahs.

I have been able to experiment with many systems and create images that are truly unique to Jewish life-cycle event photography.

Though the equipment is great and the technology allows me to overcome technical difficulties such as low light and fast focus, I can't ignore the fact that so many things had to happen in my life to give me the insight and creativity to capture these special events that will be cherished by generations to follow.

There are two Jewish beliefs that I hold to be true. The first is that one's entire life is determined at the time of birth. The person you will marry, the number of children you will have, and the life you will be able to lead are all calculated at the time of one's birth.

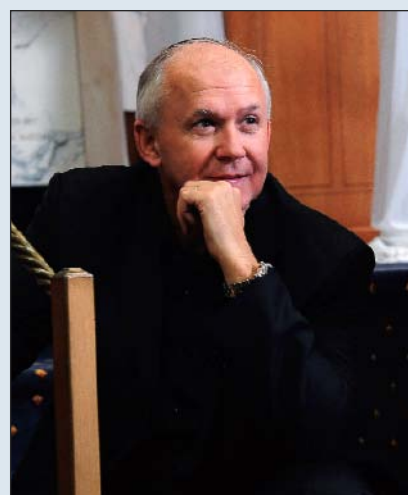


Photo by Alona Shavi.

The second is that while standing under the chuppah during the wedding ceremony, you are as close to the Divine as you will ever be. I believe this is true, as I can tell you that a little bit of every wedding comes home with me and uplifts me in a special way.

For me to have been given the ability to photograph and share in one of life's most beautiful occasions has truly been a gift. I graciously acknowledge this gift I've been given, and I give thanks.



Introduction

Mazel tov! So you are, or will be, shooting a Jewish wedding. With so many books on wedding photography, why have another just for Jewish weddings? Simple. Jewish weddings and, specifically, Orthodox Jewish weddings, are different, and photographing them is different. Knowing how they are different and what to look out for can make all the difference in your success as a photographer for these events.

This book is not about how to take photographs. It is more of a guide to the world of Jewish wedding photography. In here, you will find insight

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as to what motivates the client to book with a particular photographer or to choose a certain wedding plan. Timelines and schedules are discussed with real-world examples of how a wedding day runs its course from the photographer's perspective.

Must-have images are listed, along with creative ideas on how to photograph wedding couples before and after the chuppah. Handling large group portraits with twenty to thirty people and three to four generations of family members is no easy feat, but it can be done using the right techniques while still maintaining your sanity.

In most cases, someone buys a book or guide to find answers to specific questions or solutions to particular problems. You will find a quick question-and-answer guide in the back of this book that will direct you to a particular chapter or page for an answer. The following sample asks an important question that will guide us in introducing the body of the book:

Q: Do you have to be Jewish to photograph a Jewish wedding?

A: No, but it sure can help.

Facing page—A young Orthodox bride on the wedding day. The image was shot with a Nikon D700. The exposure was f/4.5 @ 1/1250 second.

It is more important to know what is going on around you and what is expected of you. With knowing comes confidence, and with confidence

comes ease of mind. Being able to perform under very stressful situations, while maintaining one's composure, can only come through peace of mind. I have always said that clients may forget the images I take on their wedding day many years from now, but they will never forget the person taking the pictures. The experience your clients have with you determines future business, period. Most Orthodox families have several children, and when you perform to their expectations, you can almost guarantee repeat business for all of their weddings.

This brings up a very interesting point. Why specialize in Jewish weddings? For starters, very few photographers do. This means less competition for you. Look at any major metropolitan area, and I am sure you will find several hundred photographers, all trying to market to many of the same clients. Granted, not every city has a large Jewish population to market to, but most have some client base with very limited competition from other photographers.

My observation has been that Jewish families are willing to invest more in photography. I believe there is a reason for this that most of us are not aware of. As a first-generation American and a child of Holocaust survivors, I know how important having a picture of lost relatives was to our family. For many, all that was left were a few photographs as our connection to our past. I believe that this mind-set has carried over to many of my clients, even to this day. Having the ability to share one's family from generation to generation with professional photographs and albums is, and will continue to be, a very important part of any wedding.

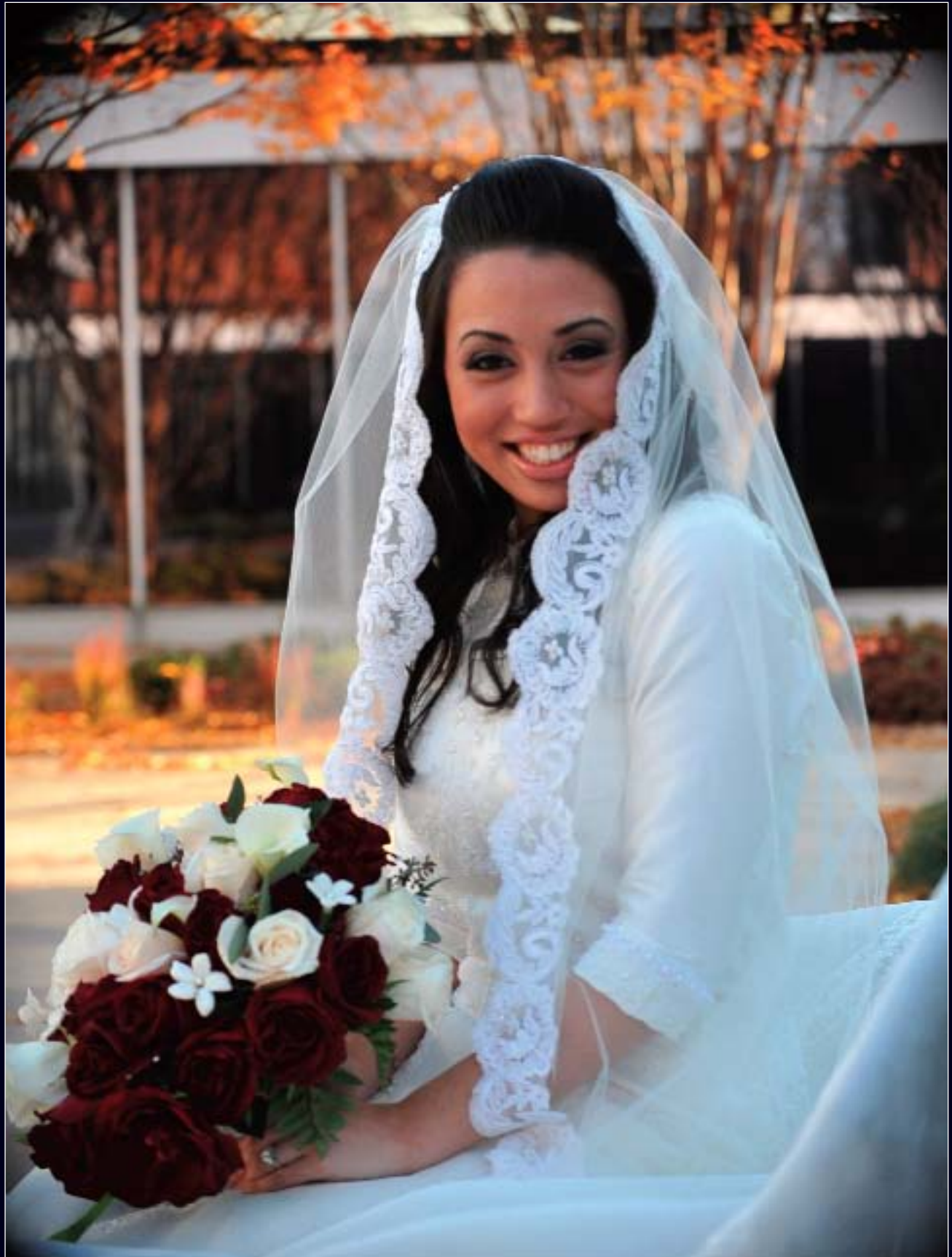
Finally, many of the weddings I shoot take place on weekdays in addition to Sundays. It is not unusual to photograph three weddings in one week. Of course, this is very demanding, and it takes several days to recover. However, where else can you get so much business in one week?

So there you have it—limited competition, an easily identifiable market, and lots of weddings to shoot. What's not to like? Sounds easy, right?

Yes and no. As you explore this book, you will find that there are several types of Jewish weddings ranging from almost completely secular to extremely Orthodox, with many degrees in between. My goal is to give you insight and guidance that will help you determine what works for you as a professional photographer so you can charter your own course and develop your own client base. Mazel tov to you and to the families whose weddings you will be photographing.

Facing page—Orthodox bride in a typical wedding gown. Notice there are no exposed shoulders or bare arms above the elbow.

As a first-generation American and a child of Holocaust survivors, I know how important having a picture of lost relatives was to our family.





1. Types of Jewish Weddings

Jewish weddings are rich with traditions, rituals, and religious requirements. Much is dependent on the families' affiliation (bride and groom), as well as the community and rabbi(s) officiating the wedding.

Jewish weddings can be classified as either Orthodox or non-Orthodox. This distinction is very well defined, as there are many rituals and customs that only appear in the Orthodox wedding. As you will discover in the following sections on Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism, there has been a blending of some of the traditions and customs, creating even newer classifications, such as the Modern Orthodox and Conservadox weddings.

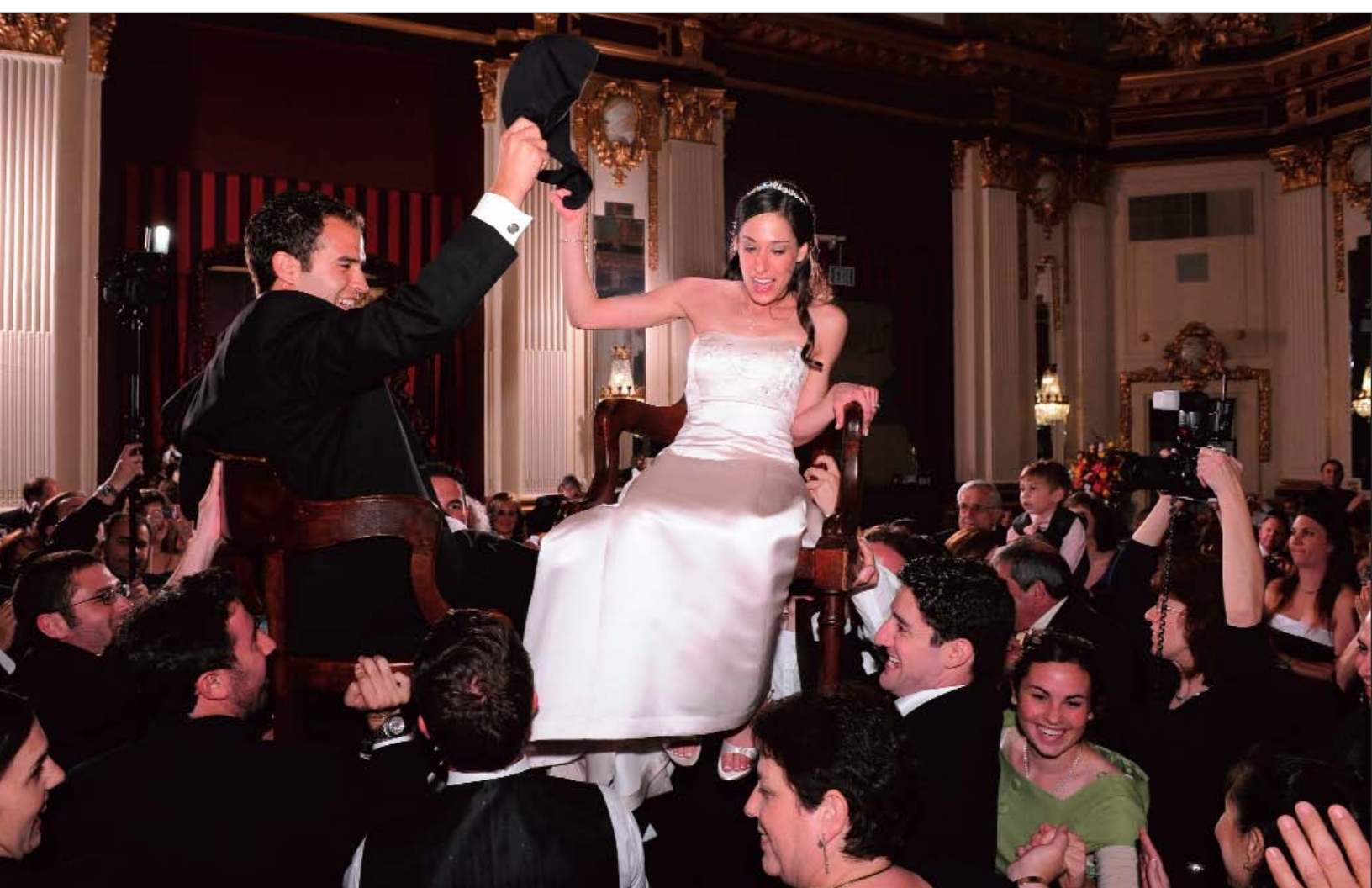
All Jewish weddings have several common features, which most of us are familiar with as a result of everyday media.

All Jewish weddings have several common features, which most of us are familiar with as a result of everyday media. The chupah (the canopy the couple stands under during the ceremony, usually made of four poles with fabric covering the top only), ketubah (marriage contract), and badeken (veiling of the bride) are all common elements in Jewish weddings. The most recognized feature is the breaking of the glass after the wedding ceremony and the shouting of mazel tov and l'chaim (to life).

There are many traditions that are common among each group, each with a unique twist. Look at the two images of the couples in the chairs during the dancing (see page 14). Can you tell which one is Orthodox and which is Conservative?

As a photographer venturing out to photograph Jewish weddings, it is critical to know what will be happening next and what is expected of you with respect to the images to be captured. This reminds me of a photographer who ended up photographing an entire evening prayer service the men were holding prior to the actual wedding ceremony. Not a single photograph had any significance, and the images were actually intrusive.

Facing page—The interesting architecture and dynamic camera angle help to make this a stand-out bridal portrait.



THE THREE MAJOR DENOMINATIONS

Judaism in the United States has three major denominations:

Reform Judaism. This movement started in Germany in the nineteenth century as a reaction to traditional Judaism, and it is based on a more liberal and personal interpretation of the Torah. For example, it is not mandatory for men to wear a head covering while in the temple during services. Many Reform rabbis are willing to perform weddings of mixed faith and allow weddings to take place throughout the entire year, which is not the case with the other denominations.

Reform weddings have the key elements of a Jewish wedding—the ketubah (contract), chuppah (canopy), badeken (veiling), and the breaking of the glass at the end of the ceremony. All of these traditions are easy to identify and take place in quick succession, even together in some cases. Most of the wedding couples of the Reform movement are comfortable with seeing each other prior to the wedding service itself. For the photographer, this is more manageable in terms of photographing the wedding couple and families.

With regard to special traditions or customs, there is very little in addition to the already mentioned key elements as compared to weddings of all faiths. During the dancing, there may be a hora (circle dance) in which the bride and groom are lifted in chairs and danced around.

Conservative (Masorti) Judaism. This sect of Judaism also originated in Germany but became formalized in the United States as an alternative

Facing page—As you can see, one of the most visible distinctions between Orthodox and non-Orthodox weddings is the separation of the men and women during the wedding. This includes the ceremony seating, the dinner seating and, of course, the dancing. **Bottom**—Notice none of the men are wearing a kippa (head covering). The ketubah and badeken will take place in this room, with just the immediate family.





Notice that the bride is signing the ketubah with the groom. This is not done in an Orthodox wedding.

to the liberal Reform movement through following more of the traditional practices of the Orthodox Jewish sector. A major difference between Orthodox and Conservative practices is the involvement of women in religious activities, which is encouraged within the Conservative synagogues.

Many of the traditional prayers and practices are adopted from the Orthodox movement to the Conservative sector, but with the addition of women. For example, women are allowed to read from the Torah in a Conservative synagogue, but not in an Orthodox synagogue.

Again, the key elements are found—the ketubah, badeken, chuppah, and the breaking of the glass. In addition, you are likely to find other components such as the aufruf (couple being called to the Torah a week before the wedding for a blessing before the congregation). This, of course, is not part of the actual wedding, nor are you permitted to photograph it.

There is a trend among Conservative families to follow some of the more Orthodox customs, such as the tish (men coming together at a table to witness the groom committing to the terms of the marriage contract). These Conservadox families align themselves with Conservative Judaism but follow many of the Orthodox customs. It is still common practice for

the groom and bride to see each other prior to the ceremony for photographs, which is rarely the case at an Orthodox wedding.

Orthodox Judaism. Orthodox Jews see themselves as followers of original Jewish law rather than belonging to a particular movement. Within Orthodox Judaism, there are communities that follow specific practices and customs. The most common distinctions are Modern Orthodox Jews, Hasidic (pious) Jews, and Ultra Orthodox Jews. The major difference is how these communities interact with the overall community in general.

For example, Modern Orthodox Jews follow the same religious laws as all Orthodox Jews but dress in modern clothing and take on jobs within the general public. From their outward appearance, the only sign of their religious beliefs may be a kippa (head covering for men) or the modest style of dress worn by Orthodox women.

On the other hand, the black fur-trimmed hats and long black coats worn by Hasidic Jews is a sure sign of their affiliation. By the way, all of this

German tradition of covering the couple in a tallit (prayer shawl) during the wedding ceremony.





Notice the candles in each of the parents' hands, even though the wedding is outdoors during daylight. This is a custom that originated during the pogroms when Jewish families had to have marriages in basements with no lights to keep others from preventing the marriage to take place.

black clothing makes it challenging for the photographer to get photographs with good detail and contrast.

What is apparent in all Orthodox gatherings is the separation of men and women for the most part. You will find separate seating in all areas, even during the sit-down meal. More modern Orthodox communities allow mixed seating at the meal but maintain separate dancing, with women on one side of a divider and men on the other side.

The Orthodox wedding has many customs and rituals that take place throughout the day. Many of these are influenced by ethnic and cultural backgrounds that have carried over through the years from their previous origins.

Jewish communities also have cultural distinctions, which have created different customs and traditions within each denomination. These are: Ashkenazi (42 percent of the Jewish population), Sephardic (37 percent), and Mizrahi (16 percent). These ethnic divisions are mostly based on geographic areas where Jewish communities flourished over the centuries, which influenced their daily routines, such as language, dress, crafts, and foods.

Ashkenazi Jews are descendants from Eastern and Central Europe, and many of their customs are derived from the area. Yiddish, a popular language from this region, is a combination of several languages that is still very much in use among many Hasidic Jews. Much of the Jewish population in the United States (5 million) is of Ashkenazi descent, which is mostly due to the immigration following World War I and II.

Sephardic Jews generally originated from Spain and Portugal between 1492 and 1497, before they were deported. Many of these Jews ended up in the Middle East, and today the term “Sephardic Jew” applies to most Jews of Arab and Persian background. Ladino is a language that was carried over from the Spanish/Portuguese influence, just as Yiddish was derived from the European languages.

Mizrahi Jews descend from the Jewish communities of the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, including many of the Arab countries. For the most part, they all follow Sephardic traditions.

Bride and groom during henna ritual.





Facing page—Sephardic bride after the chuppah. The ribbon tied around her hand was part of the henna ritual.

Not all Jewish weddings will be the same, nor will they have the same customs and traditions, even though they do follow the same Jewish laws.

As one can see, not all Jewish weddings will be the same, nor will they have the same customs and traditions, even though they do follow the same Jewish laws.

In general terms, Reform weddings have the most relaxed observances of Jewish law, while still following many customs and traditions, and Ultra Orthodox ceremonies have the strictest observance of Jewish law. This is

important for the photographer to keep in mind as timetables, schedules, and practices are very much dependent upon how observant the family is. For example, Orthodox couples will fast on the day of the wedding, not drinking or eating the entire day until after they have been married. Knowing this beforehand, a photographer can be considerate of the couple's fast and take this into

account when interacting with the couple throughout the course of the day.

As you venture out in your role as a wedding photographer, offering your services to the Jewish communities you wish to serve, keep in mind that there are many different degrees of Judaism in both religious and cultural aspects. The greater your understanding of these differences, the easier it will be for you to present your services in a meaningful, respectful, and successful manner.

A good example of this is that when meeting with an Orthodox family, it is customary for a man not to shake hands with any woman out of respect to her gender. Knowing this beforehand gives a male photographer credibility as someone who has an understanding and respect for Jewish Orthodox customs and practices.



2. Marketing for Jewish Weddings

The goal of marketing is to attract clients to your services. The key to success in marketing is to have the right message in the right place during the right time period. All three must be correct for effective marketing.

As was already shown, there are two distinct markets when it comes to Jewish weddings, Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Your marketing strategy must take this into account, as separate marketing efforts are required for each.

For example, a web site designed to target non-Orthodox families may be offensive to some Orthodox families. What may appear to be a wonderful wedding couple photo may reveal too much of the woman and will therefore not be in good taste for the Orthodox community.

Using the right imagery along with the right message in your marketing efforts will guarantee that you attract the interest of your target market. The placement of your message and the timing can also make all the difference to your success.

Using the right imagery along with the right message as part of your marketing effort will guarantee that you attract the interest of your target market.

ORTHODOX AND NON-ORTHODOX WEDDINGS: DIFFERENCES AND INFLUENCES

This item-by-item comparison is beneficial in understanding the process by which a family will decide who and when they will book for their photography.

Timing. Orthodox families will usually have a wedding two to three months after a couple is engaged. While this seems like a very short time frame for planning a wedding, it seems to always work out. The event location and all of the vendors needed are selected and booked with very little advance notice. A photographer working in the Orthodox wedding market must have the ability to book on demand, so to speak, and have dates open that fit this timeframe. In addition, many weddings will fall in the middle of the week, so availability for weekdays will be a must to work

Facing page—Using the right imagery along with the right message in your marketing efforts will guarantee that you attract the interest of your target market.

within this market. Much of this work is based on referrals, with little advertising required once you have established yourself in the market for these types of weddings.

Non-Orthodox families will typically have the wedding several months to about a year after the engagement. This allows for long-term planning with lots of research done by the family. These weddings benefit from typical advertising sources and the usual weddings guides. Also, web sites are used extensively by these families.

Buying Influences. Orthodox families having a wedding will most likely have several children and will most likely have already had a wedding or two by the time they get to you. Among the Orthodox communities, guidelines have been established determining how the couple's families will share the cost of the wedding for their children. It is common for the groom's side to choose and pay for the wedding photography, with the approval of the bride's side of the family. This falls under the FLOP system (Flowers, Liquor, Orchestra, and Photography).

It is common for the groom's side to choose and pay for the wedding photography, with the approval of the bride's side of the family.

With this in mind, the key influence in making the photography purchase will be the groom's side. It is also very likely that the groom's parents will be from another city and state, so much of your communication will be by phone.

Because Orthodox families typically have several children, photography budgets are somewhat limited. The average price for a wedding will fall between \$3,500.00 and \$5,000.00 for a package that must include three albums (one for the couple and two parent albums). The good news is that this same family may very well book you to photograph all of their children's weddings.

The non-Orthodox family's expectations will be much different than the Orthodox family's. For non-Orthodox families, the bride will most likely be a college grad and in her mid-twenties. She will select most of the vendors for the wedding with approval from the parents. She will look at many web sites and will have a very specific type of photographer in mind. Many times, it will be the wedding couple who make the final decision and go to contract, though this depends on the age of the wedding couple as well.

Orthodox brides are usually right out of high school or midway through college, from nineteen to twenty-two years old, and may not have had exposure to the same things as the non-Orthodox bride.

Wedding Packages and Shooting Styles. Orthodox families will want more traditional images, and most wedding albums will lean toward flush-mount or matted albums. Part of this is due to the influence of the parents, as the bride and groom are relatively young, usually in their early twenties.



Orthodox families have many children. Be prepared to allow extra time for photographing family groups during the shoot.

Budgets will be tighter for the Orthodox family, and with good reason. These are usually large events with many guests in attendance, and for most families, this could very well be one of several weddings they have had or will have.

While most of the pre-reception photography will be formal with lots of posed images, the majority of the reception images will be photojournalistic, with lots of action shots. Photos of the bride and groom will be very reserved. Don't look for, or expect, any kissing. With all of the different elements of the Orthodox wedding, you can anticipate shooting 1,000 to 1,500 images of the event.

Wedding packages for Orthodox weddings rarely have any engagement photos, since they are not expected. Again, there will need to be three albums. In addition, proof prints are a must-have, and 4x6-inch prints will be expected.



For the most part, your clients will expect good-quality images with traditional album designs and excellent package pricing. The ability to cope with large family portraits with limited time is critical as well. Much of this business is generated through referrals, and your attitude under pressure, as well as your ability to cope, does not go unnoticed. Your people skills will be just as important as your photographic skills.

A less formal style of photography and graphically designed magazine-style albums are in demand. Engagement sessions are expected, and the photos are used for newspaper announcements and the like. Also, couples will usually see each other beforehand, and more intimate wedding pictures can be taken.

When capturing images, the less intrusive your approach, the better. Keep in mind that the overall feel for the wedding will be a more mature and subdued audience as compared to the Orthodox wedding. Here your creative style and artistic album designs are sure to lead to future wedding bookings.

Above—A modern Orthodox father with his three daughters. It is customary to photograph the bride and family first, then to capture images of the groom and family, since the couple will not see each other prior to the chuppah. **Facing page**—A groom's portrait prior to the chuppah. A black hat and white tie are typically worn by the Orthodox groom.





According to Jewish law, a woman is considered married once the wedding ring is placed on her finger. This is a very important image to capture.

MARKETING FOR ORTHODOX WEDDINGS

Much of this business is generated through word-of-mouth referrals. One of the best ways to get started is to generate relationships with the caterers who provide kosher food for these events. In many ways, these caterers are wedding planners in and of themselves and run the entire wedding day from start to finish. It is easy to identify these companies, as they will be listed under “kosher catering” in the yellow pages of your phone book. Introduce yourself and ask how you might be able to offer your services to the Jewish community. You may offer price reductions for a family in need

of help, or schedule some weekday weddings to get your experience. (A weekday wedding is usually a smaller affair with fewer guests. The families are usually working with a smaller budget and may be willing to hire a photographer with less experience.) These caterers can be one of your best sources of referrals.

Pick up a copy of each magazine, and look at who and what is being advertised. When you see an ad you like, find out who created it and contact them.

Most Jewish communities have a monthly or weekly magazine, such as the *Baltimore Jewish Times* (weekly) or the *Where What When* (monthly). The best way to find what publications are available is to visit the local kosher food market and see what publications are on display. Pick up a copy of each magazine, and look at who and what is being advertised. When you see an ad you like, find out who created the ad and contact them to design your ad.

Knowing what to say and how to say it is also important. The same goes for what images are considered acceptable for advertising.

Having a web site is pretty much standard for every studio. Consider having one just for the Orthodox community with images and wording that highlight your ability to photograph these events. The ability to fine-tune your marketing message to your target audience makes your service more desirable.

If you have a true desire to service this market, and you spread the word, sooner or later you will find a gatekeeper. This will be someone who sees your desire and sincerity and will help you form relationships. This may end up being a vendor or even a past customer.

For the most part, Orthodox communities are very close, and everyone talks about their experiences. Be sure to give your clients something good to talk about, and you will be noticed.



3. *Photographing the Orthodox Wedding*

With so much going on, sometimes even at the same time, it is almost impossible for one shooter to photograph an Orthodox wedding.

Since much of the photography of a Jewish wedding is dependent on the timing of events, and the significance of these events, it only makes sense to follow a timeline to help in understanding what is expected of you as a photographer. In this chapter, I will walk you through the day, step by step, and not only tell you about what is happening, but show you samples of pictures and give you a photographer's perspective. In essence, you will be reading my thoughts as I work through the shoot and as I plan my course of action should something go wrong. Everything from lighting, lens types, shutter speeds, and posing family members, to the best positions and the must-have detail shots will be presented. With the timeline and my insights from photographing actual events, you should be able to put yourself into the scene and gain a personal understanding of what is needed to get the shot.

As you read this chapter and look at the sample images, imagine that you are at the event, taking the same image. Ask yourself what you would do differently to get the intended image. Work the scene in your mind, and in doing so, you will have rehearsed for an upcoming event, with the only difference being the location and the clients. For me, the fact that these weddings follow a fixed timeline with similar rituals is reassuring, since I know what should be happening next and I can prepare myself both physically and creatively.

Of all Jewish weddings, the Orthodox wedding has the most rituals and customs. With so much going on, sometimes even at the same time, it is almost impossible for one shooter to photograph an Orthodox wedding. Having two shooters definitely helps, and having one female shooter makes for the ideal scenario.

Since the Orthodox wedding is the least understood by many photographers, we will start with it first, followed by a look at Conservative and

Facing page—Notice that though the couple is posed together, they are not touching one another. Having the groom hold the flowers with the bride is sometimes all you can expect.

Reform weddings. As you will see, many of the rituals and customs are carried over from the Orthodox wedding, but with some modifications and, in most cases, the inclusion of women in the ritual.

THE ORTHODOX WEDDING TIMELINE

From start to finish, most Orthodox weddings will take a photographer nine to ten hours. This estimate is based on three hours for the bride, groom, and family shots; two hours for the tish, badeken, and chuppah; and the remaining four to five hours for the two dance sets, meal, and blessings at the end.



Be sure to check if the chuppah will be left standing after the ceremony. Backlighting is a must, and a barebulb Qflash with a PocketWizard is all that's needed.



Working without flash is best, so use a high ISO setting to get the light you need. Even if you end up with a lot of noise, you can make the images black & white for a nice effect.

Plan to arrive at the wedding location about three hours before the event starting time to meet the family and get information as to the size of each family to be photographed. With this information, scope out areas that work for individual bride or groom portraits, as well as large family group photos. Also, keep in mind, you will need pictures of the bride and groom with their families.

If it is left standing after the ceremony, the chuppah itself is a great spot for taking the after-chuppah pictures. Prior to the event, you will want to check to see if the chuppah will still be standing. Also, remember that there will be limited time after the chuppah, as the families are going to want to get the dancing started. In most cases you are looking at thirty to forty-five minutes of shooting time, 50 percent of which will go to the large group family photos. Some family portraits may include up to fifty relatives, including small children. Therefore, you will want to find an area where you





Every bride will have a chaperone (usually a female friend or relative) who stays by her side. If you are a male, you can ask for this woman's help with moving veils, assisting with changing the bride's position, bustling trains, etc., to get some beautiful portraits of the bride.

can get people in and out for the photos. It is recommended to have them meet you there immediately after the chuppah.

With these preliminaries out of the way, you can start taking photos.

THE BRIDE'S IMAGES

The bride will most likely have her hair and makeup done at the venue, which makes for some nice getting-ready shots. This is also a great time for parents to be involved with putting the veil on the bride.

Grandmothers are key figures in Jewish families. They often run several households, since their own children often marry and have kids when they are younger than their peers. Keep an eye out for grandmothers. If they like you, you will get plenty of referrals. If you get on their bad side, you will kill any chance of booking other weddings in the community.

Now it's time to start working with the bride. Keep in mind, this is most likely a young girl around nineteen to twenty-two, and she may feel uncomfortable in front of the camera. She also may be fasting, as is custom-



Keep an eye out for poses and locations that capture the bride's personality, make for a great backdrop, or capture some other important element of the wedding or reception locale.

ary for the bride and groom on their wedding day. Take your time and start slow, and let her warm up to you. Give encouragement, but, if you are a man, do not touch the bride, as this is not allowed. In fact, when greeting the parents and family, you should only offer your hand to a man if you're a man. Do not offer to shake hands or casually touch a woman, in respect to their modesty. This is where having a woman working with you can be a big help as they can help pose and arrange the bride's dress for pictures.

When working with the bride, get images that capture her special qualities, and make use of everything around you. Glass or windows are great for indirect light or reflections. You can use walls or columns to lean on.

Don't forget to get details of the dress, jewelry, and flowers. Be sure to ask if something is okay before you try a shot. Note that modesty is key. The gown will not show the bride's bare shoulders or arms.

Having said all of this, you will find that there is still much you can capture using your creativity and a little patience.

A great deal of effort goes into selecting the flowers and other accessories for the wedding, so be sure to capture the details that make each wedding unique. Try to photograph a wedding invitation or a bencher (prayer book for grace) inscribed with the couple's names—or any of the other special details the couple has selected for their wedding.





Ask the bride what type of photos she envisions of herself and, more importantly, of her and the groom after the chuppah. It is good to ask how comfortable they will be for photos. Some will tell you no touching at all or just holding flowers together may be the limit for them. It is okay to ask, and by doing so, you will know what to expect from them after the chuppah.



Small children can melt down very quickly and disrupt the entire group, with everyone trying to help. I use a whistle and some shiny object in one hand, pretending to do a magic trick. Once I have the children's attention, I fire off the shot. This takes a little practice, but shooting one-handed gets the job done.

THE BRIDE AND FAMILY IMAGES

These will be pictures of the bride and her immediate family and grandparents. These can sometimes become very large group photos with up to six or seven siblings. If any of the siblings are married, then their spouses and families are photographed as well. Getting twenty-plus family members together can be a challenge, and it takes a fast shooting style, so as not to lose everyone in the process. By far, this is one of the most challenging aspects of shooting Orthodox weddings.

In setting up these group photos, you will need to remember that the men and women will be standing apart—women on one side and men on the other. Modern Orthodox families will be more relaxed and may let you pose couples together.

Once you have the large group photos, you will also be expected to do individual pictures of the bride with siblings and some of her friends. For the most part, there are no bridesmaids or groomsmen in Orthodox weddings. Also, plan on taking individual pictures of the siblings. Many families appreciate having single portraits of all their children.

As you photograph parents and grandparents, be mindful of not touching anyone, as this may be disrespectful.

FINISHING UP WITH THE BRIDE'S IMAGES

Depending on the size of the family, this part of the job should take an hour to an hour and a half. Now the bride needs to be escorted back to the bridal room or another area where she may want to say her prayers or



Facing page—When photographing the groom outside with a black hat, you will need adequate fill for the face (eyes) from a flash or reflector. Another thing to notice while photographing the groom is the fringes of his tzitzit, which may hang out from under his jacket. It is customary for men to wear an undergarment with these fringes. It is okay to ask the groom to tuck the fringes in for the photos. **Right**—Note that female photographers should not touch the groom while posing him for portraits (or at any other time).



Psalms, which are customary for the day of one's wedding. If allowed, you can create some very moving photos, so ask if you can discreetly take a few pictures.

THE GROOM'S IMAGES

By now, the groom should have arrived. He will probably be in seclusion with his shomare (chaperone) and may be saying prayers as well. If you are

a male photographer, you have more flexibility in working with the groom, as a female photographer should not touch the groom.

You will be taking many of the same types of images as you did with the bride. Remember that the groom will most likely be fasting as well, so take it easy. Most grooms are uncomfortable posing for photos, so try to get them to relax, and help them find a natural stance that puts them at ease. A good idea for this is to put one leg up on a step/chair/curb with his arms resting on his legs and upper body leaning toward the camera. You can also ask him to simply place his hands in his pockets.

One's hat is often used as a sign of belonging to a specific profession or subscribing to an ideal. A chef's hat, train conductor's hat, and a police officer's hat, for example, instantly identify the wearer as belonging to a certain occupation. Similarly, different hats in Judaism identify the wearer as belonging to a certain way of life. A fur-trimmed hat means that the wearer is a member of the Hasidic community. No hat indicates a more Modern Orthodox individual. One who wears a black-brimmed hat associates himself with a more rabbinic community and tends to be stricter in his observance of the Torah law. For many Orthodox grooms, getting good photos with their hat is important. Many times, they may not want any photos without wearing the hat.

The Groom and Family Images. This will basically be a repeat of what was done with the bride and her family—large group photos with babies and grandparents. To get the job going, you will have to be assertive, always with a sense of humor. One of the biggest complaints I hear from clients about other photographers is that he or she was too pushy. Years from now, many of the people in the picture will have forgotten the great photo you took, but they will remember how you treated them that day.

Since most Orthodox families have several children, and they all marry relatively young, there can be many grandchildren for the family photo.

One group photo that is so important, which has to be one of the most difficult to take, is the grandparents with all of the grandchildren. Since most Orthodox families have several children, and they all marry relatively young, there can be many grandchildren for the family photo. This is no easy task, and it takes a lot of luck to get a really good photo.

For many of these group photos, you have limited working space and have to work quickly. An extra-wide-angle lens helps with this. Use a minimum of 18mm or less. Also, for very large groups, standing on a chair or ladder (a must-have tool for photographing Orthodox weddings) will help you get better coverage by being at a higher angle.

Finishing Up with the Groom's Images. By now, you should have been working for at least two, if not three, hours straight. The bride should be in seclusion, waiting to make her grand entrance with the two mothers.



Don't try to talk a family out of getting a photo of the grandparents and grandchildren. For them, it is important, and for you, it is a real challenge. If you get a good image, great!—if not, you tried and were very nice while doing so. Remember, your clients will remember the way they were treated long after the wedding day.

The groom should be heading to the area where the tish will be, and you should be planning your next steps as to where you will be.

Guests will have started to arrive, and soon a reception known as the *kabalas panim* will start. This is not the reception after a wedding ceremony, but the reception to greet the bride and groom. Since they do not see each other before the *badeken*, there will be two gatherings in two different places, one for the women and one for the men. Now you will have to decide where you will be. If there are two of you (highly recommended), then one goes with the groom to the tish, and the other goes to the area where the *badeken* will happen, which is where the woman will be. If there are two photographers, a male and a female, the female should photograph the women and the man should photograph the men.

THE KABALAS PANIM

Prior to the wedding ceremony it is customary to hold a reception, called the *kabalas panim* (greeting of faces), for the men in honor of the groom,

and for women in honor of the bride. At this point, food will be on display for the guests that are arriving, and the musicians will have set up in the area of the badeken as well.

The groom will be out of the area (at the tish) with all of the men, and now the bride will make her grand entrance into the room, escorted by the two mothers with music from the band. This is a great photo opportunity, as the mothers walk arm in arm with the bride into the room. This happens pretty fast, so you want to be early in getting to the area where the bride will be. If you are working solo, make getting the photos of the bride and the mothers your goal. If you are working with an assistant, have your helper photograph the tish.

During this part of the reception, you will notice that the caterer has most likely uncovered all of the food on the tables and the guests are starting to eat. Now is also a good time to get some food pictures. Consider offering prints to the caterer in addition to the family. This is also a good time to get some food for yourself, which is okay. There will probably be some food at the tish as well, but there is usually more of a variety near the bride, which is where most of the guests end up gathering.

Mothers escorting the bride to her place of honor, with dancing and song.





The mothers and grandmothers will be seated next to the bride on a platform. This is one of the must-have images. Here you should have three, if not four, generations of the family represented.

THE TISH

The word “tish” is Yiddish for “table.” The groom is seated at a large table with the fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and all of the male guests seated around him (sorry, no women). There will be several rabbis, most of whom are invited guests, as well as the rabbi that will be officiating the wedding. This rabbi will be discussing wedding details with the groom and both of the fathers before getting started with the ketubah.

THE KETUBAH

The ketubah is a legal document between the bride and groom. It is signed by two witnesses who testify that the husband will fulfill his obligations to provide support for his wife. While the ketubah is written in Aramaic it is important that the bride and groom understand its contents, which the rabbi explains to the groom at the tish.

During the tish, many symbolic acts will take place, each of which have a special meaning, and you, the photographer, will be expected to capture these. Much of this happens with little warning, and you will need to be alert at all times. Very often, the tables are set up in a large U shape with a



head table. You will want to get a seat in front of the head table, facing the groom and rabbi. From this vantage point you will have the best chance of getting the images needed of the proceedings.

The rabbi will take a pen, handkerchief, or a kippa (head covering), show this to the fathers, and explain to them what they should do. They are instructed to raise their hands with the item and then give it to the rabbi. This gives him the authority to act on the fathers' behalf to marry the couple. The father will take the item, hold it up for all to see, and then give to the rabbi. Each father will do this, as well as the groom. This may happen very fast, so stay with it!

Next, the rabbi will fill out the ketubah, and very often, as he is doing so, other rabbis will discuss the ketubah with him in the presence of the groom. This makes for a great shot, so watch out for this.

After the rabbi fills out the ketubah, the witnesses for the groom will come up and sign the ketubah. Again, these are honored guests, and a photo of each is warranted.

Throughout the tish, the men will be singing, and different guests will come up to wish mazel tov to the groom. Some of these may be rabbis from large schools, and you should make sure to get these images as well.

Soon you will see the mothers of the bride and groom escorted in. This is your signal to get ready for the next custom, which is when the moth-

Facing page—Rabbi filling in the ketubah prior to chuppah. **Above**—Rabbi explaining the customs to the groom, who is on the right.







Facing page—(Top) Father of the groom holding a pen (can be any item) in front of witnesses, showing he is giving the rabbi authority to act as his representative in performing the marriage. (Bottom) Often, the men will be wearing black hats. When the witness sits down to sign the ketubah, his hat will cover all of his face, as well as the ketubah. Take your camera down low so that you are almost laying on the table, and shoot from this angle. If you are using flash (I use an Omni-Bounce on my Nikon flash), place your hand in front of the flash with your fingers spread open. This will diffuse the flash when shooting up close like this. **Above**—Mothers breaking a plate at the men's tish. This happens very fast, so be on guard after the guest finishes reading the tena'im out loud.

ers break a plate (wrapped in a cloth) on the edge of a chair. This is part of the tena'im.

THE TENA'IM

After the ketubah is signed by the witnesses, one additional document is read aloud at the tish. The reader will also be an honored guest, so a photo should be captured. Off to the side, you will see the mothers waiting for the guest to finish reading the tena'im.

The tena'im (plural) are actually the contents of a premarital contract that is drawn up at the time of engagement. This agreement stipulates the



Be sure to stay with the groom, as you will be pushed out of the way by the dancing men. You only need to stay with him for part of the dancing, as you will need to get to the bride and select a position from which to get images of the veiling and blessings by family.

intent for the couple to get married, as well as obligations associated with the marriage. Today the tena'im are drawn up and presented at the tish right after the ketubah, just before heading out to the chuppah for the wedding. The reason this is done this way is because by not having the tena'im several months before the wedding itself, one would not be breaking an agreement should the engagement be called off.

Once the honored guest finishes reading the tena'im document, the mothers break the plate. This is a must-have photo and will be expected. Be sure to get the hugs and expressions after the plate is broken. They make for some of the best pictures in an album.

The custom of breaking the plate is symbolic of the idea that what has just been done cannot be undone. In other words, just as a broken plate cannot be put back the same way, the marriage should never change. This is not a religious act, but an old custom from Europe.

With all of this done, it is now time for the fathers to escort the groom to where the bride is sitting, waiting to be veiled. The mothers are sent

back to sit with the bride, and the musicians join the groom as the fathers escort him to the badeken amidst the sound of trumpets, saxophones, and clarinets. This music, which can be heard throughout the hall, is a signal that the groom is approaching. All of the men gather around singing and dancing, escorting the groom to his waiting bride.

This part of the reception is so charged with anticipation and energy—the groom has not seen the bride beforehand, usually for several days. You will feel included in this wonderful exhibition of joy for the soon-to-be-wed couple. If you can, as you move ahead, stop and see if you can get the musicians leading the group included in the image of the men bringing the groom.

As you rush ahead to get positioned for the veiling, you need to look out for several things. If there is a videographer, look to see where he or she is positioned. This will most likely be on a ladder on the side. You will want to be opposite the videographer so that when you raise your arms for overhead shots, you do not block the video. If there are two of you, one person should go down low and take pictures from a low angle up into the face of the family during the badeken, and the other should shoot top-down and out wide. This is where a wide-angle lens works well.

THE BADEKEN

“Badeken” means “covering” in Yiddish. Prior to the wedding ceremony under the chuppah, it is customary for the groom, accompanied by singing relatives and friends, to cover the bride’s face with her veil. This custom has several origins, including the biblical episode when Rebecca met her future husband and covered her face with a veil as an act of modesty. An-

other source is the concept that just as one covers valuable items that are cherished, so a groom veils the bride, demonstrating his recognition and appreciation of her worth.

Having photographed hundreds of Orthodox weddings, I can still say this is by far the most emotional part of the entire day, and it gets to me each and every time.

The look on a bride’s face as she looks at her beshert (chosen one) is like no other. What happens next is even more moving.

Once the groom veils the bride, he backs away. Now the fathers of the bride and groom, the grandfathers, and the rabbis offer blessings to the bride. These blessings have many themes, which are mostly for the couple to be fruitful and have children.

With so much going on, it is easy to have tunnel vision and miss what is happening behind you as the groom is leaving the bride. Many times the groom will be lifted up on the mens’ shoulders and carried out where he

It is customary for the groom, accompanied by singing relatives and friends, to cover the bride’s face with her veil.



Above—The author escorting his son to the bedeken in a Conservadox (Conservative-Orthodox customs) wedding. Photo by Alona Shavi. **Facing page**—The Badeken makes for some very emotional photos for the family. Think of the image of your grandfather blessing you or your children as one of the last images you have of them. Since you will be fairly close, you may want to control your flash output. For me, the fastest way to do this is to place one hand with open fingers in front of the flash (I use an Omni-Bounce). You will want to have more flash for the exit of the groom, which can be very dramatic.

then turns and waves or blows a kiss to the bride. Keep your eyes open for this if it happens, as it goes by very quickly.

With the badeken now over, everyone will be heading to the chuppah for the wedding ceremony. There is no need to rush, as it will take time. The groom is escorted to a room where he gets himself ready. The bride will be doing the same, and often prayers are recited by the bride and groom silently as they wait.

The procession will be starting soon, but before the groom is brought to the chuppah, he may be dressed with a kittel (white garment) in the room where he is waiting. This may take place under the chuppah a little later, too. You may not know this beforehand, so it is best for you to find out in case you need to stay with the groom as the kittel is placed on him by his father and siblings.

Most of the time, the dressing of the kittel is done under the chuppah in front of everyone. The more Orthodox, the more likely it will be done before the groom is brought to the chuppah.







Facing page—(Top) Be on the look out for the groom's exit. This picture is very easy to miss with all of the attention directed toward the bride. (Bottom) Find out beforehand where the groom will be dressed with the kittel. It is not always at the chuppah. **Above**—It is rare to get any really great shots of the groom or bride being brought to the chuppah, as they will have their heads bowed while reciting prayers, as is customary.

The white kittel is symbolic of spiritual purity, and the groom is deemed to be free of sins as he starts his life together with his bride. This is a very personal moment for the groom's family, and it is one that should be captured without interference.

Many Orthodox families have the rabbi put ashes on the groom's forehead before he goes to the chuppah. This is symbolic of the destruction of the holy temple and reminds the groom that even in the most joyous days of his life, he should not forget Jerusalem. This is a private moment and should not be photographed.

As you can see, there are so many symbolic rituals that take place, each with a special meaning to the families. You will also notice that it is customary for the bride and groom to come to the chuppah without any jewelry. This is to remind the couple of their mortality; they come into this world with nothing and will leave with nothing but the good deeds they perform.

THE PROCESSIONAL AND CHUPPAH

As you have probably noticed by this point, most Orthodox weddings do not have bridesmaids, groomsmen, a best man, etc. You would have known this from the family pictures you took early during the day.

It is customary for the parents to bring the children to the chuppah, with the groom escorted first. Some weddings will have both fathers bring the groom and both mothers bring the bride. This depends mostly on the family's wishes, and is agreed upon beforehand.





Facing page and above—Do not be afraid to move around the chuppah for photos, as there is much activity that takes place near and under the chuppah, and no one is going to complain. You'll even find guests jumping up to get into a picture and then moving back.

Today, siblings and grandparents may walk in first and take seats or stand near the chuppah before the groom and bride are escorted.

If the groom has not been dressed with the kittel, the groom's parents will do so now under the chuppah. Not all grooms wear a kittel, as seen in many modern Orthodox weddings. These are important images, and you should not be afraid to move around to get good angles.

Once the groom is ready under the chuppah, the bride is escorted in by her parents, just as the groom was earlier. The bride is brought to the chuppah, at which time it is customary for the bride to circle the groom seven times with the help of the mothers.

There are several explanations for this custom. The one I like the best is that no matter which way the groom turns he shall see his bride, and for the bride, the groom shall be the center of her life. The reason for seven circles is that it represents the seven days of creation, and now the bride and groom are creating a world of their own.

Since you are now at the chuppah, it helps to gain a little understanding of how things will proceed. The bride and groom, along with their



parents, will be standing there for the entire ceremony. In addition, you will have the rabbi and a relative or close friend who will be making announcements and calling up family members to recite one of the blessings. When it is time to place the ring on the bride's finger, two witnesses are also called up.

Add to this two or three people who are off to the side and may sing some of the blessings, a videographer, and even some small children who have decided to come join in. My point is that this is a very relaxed atmosphere, and there is little for you to worry about as far as moving around to get a good angle. Flash is okay, so don't worry. Don't be surprised if all of a sudden, people are standing next to you with a camera taking one or two shots as well.

Because the mood is so relaxed, you should make good use of the flexibility you have. Try different angles. Look for light illuminating a hand, glass, or book; these make great images. By the way, this only holds true for Orthodox weddings. The rabbis at Conservative and Reform weddings are less forgiving when it comes to using flash and moving around.

I will caution you to watch your step as you move around. Once, I was under the chuppah during an outdoor wedding, and as I moved to another position, my foot got caught on the microphone wire, and down I went,

Facing page—This is a great opportunity to get some images of the bride and groom. By moving around the chuppah, you can find some interesting angles and great lighting for some very dramatic shots. **Below**—With all of the activity under the chuppah, you are pretty free to move about to photograph from different angles. Go for the shot, just watch your step!



right in the middle of a blessing. I saved my camera, tore my pants, and had blood running down my leg. The videographer (a good friend of mine) turned to me and said, “Don’t worry, I got it all on tape for the family. I’ll get you a copy.”

The chuppah is special to Jewish weddings, and there are many explanations for its significance. I like the explanation that the canopy represents the Clouds of Glory, which enveloped the Jewish people in the wilderness. Some chuppahs are freestanding, and others have four persons holding each of the poles (great, more people at the chuppah!). Some have handmade coverings that have passed through generations, while others are covered with lace and flowers. They are all beautiful, especially when the bride and groom are standing underneath the canopy. (Hint: Many chuppahs have been passed down through the family over generations and may have special meaning to the family.)

When you get to the chuppah before the wedding procession, you want to look for creative shots, such as the ones shown on the facing page.

Once the bride completes the seven circles, everyone takes their place under the chuppah and the wedding ceremony begins. Most ceremonies last an average of thirty to forty-five minutes, and there will be people com-

Look at the number of people at the chuppah. You just have to move in to get the shot!





The wedding couple will have a prayer book containing blessings for the wedding created with their names and sometimes a custom monogram in Hebrew letters on the cover. Ensure that you capture a photograph of the prayer book. This is an important image that is sometimes used in the beginning of the wedding album.



ing and going to the chuppah. You will want to capture each guest given the honor of a blessing for the bride and groom, as well as the parents offering wine to their children. The rabbi will also read the ketubah to the couple, and this event will make for a great image. The above images illustrate the type of photos you can expect.

There are several images that are very significant, and you will want to try your best to get these. Here they are:

- Wide-angle shot of chuppah from back
- Rabbi reading ketubah
- Bride given the ketubah
- Ring placed on bride's finger
- Breaking of the glass

We are almost at the end of the wedding ceremony. Soon the groom will break the glass with his foot, and everyone will shout mazel tov. You need to stay alert here. Before you know it, the glass will be on the floor, and down will come the groom's foot. The breaking of the glass is the most recognized act of a Jewish wedding. There are many explanations as to why this is done, but by far, the most accepted explanation has to do with us not forgetting the destruction of the holy temple in Jerusalem at our most joyous times.

It is often customary that just before breaking the glass, someone will recite or sing about not forgetting Jerusalem. This is a good signal to get





Facing page and above—Be sure to capture detail shots as well as images of the key players.

ready as well. I find that the Conservative and Reform rabbis make a big show of the breaking of the glass by putting the groom in the right position for a good view by the guests. This is a big help for me, as I have time to move to the front of the chuppah and get a wide shot with everyone looking at the groom while he breaks the glass underfoot. This is not the case at Orthodox weddings, where this all happens very quickly.

Now everyone will start to hug and congratulate the bride and groom, as family and guests join in under the chuppah. These can be some of the most emotional and realistic photos you will get from the wedding. A tear, a hug, a look—that says it all. I just stand in the middle of it all and take wide-angle photos with my D3 at a rate of eight frames per second with no flash. This group hug will last about a minute, and the bride and groom will be danced out from the chuppah, where they will be left alone for the yichud (about ten minutes in a private room).

There are many Orthodox weddings that take place outdoors, under open skies, even in the dead of winter! This custom is founded on the belief that G-d's blessings will fall on the couple without barriers between them and G-d. For the photographer, this is tough work for several reasons. These include low light, cold temperatures, bulky clothing, hard-to-work-



When the witnesses are brought up, and the rabbi holds the wedding band for them to see, you must get into position and prepare for this important shot. I have my Nikon D3 set up so I can kill my flash with the function button, and use high ISO for a natural light image. This is one of the most difficult images to capture under the chuppah, and it is one that I am known for.





Above—This is the best time to shoot rapidly, taking snapshots. With all of the activity, there is little chance to get composed shots, so just go for it. Shooting from a wide angle using a high ISO setting works best. **Right**—You will want to have the parents keep the couple on schedule and have them come out from yichud in a reasonable amount of time. Right after yichud, you will be taking photos of the couple alone, and the couple with their entire families. Time will be tight for this.

with-gloves, and a winter coat. The light problem has been solved for the most part, with high-ISO cameras doing a remarkable job.

YICHUD

Right after the chuppah, the couple is danced to a room to be by themselves. This is a symbolic act that shows that the couple is married and is now allowed to be alone together without chaperones. The couple is usually in the room for only about ten minutes, and they enjoy a small meal together, since they have been fasting the entire day up to this point. Contrary to some rumors, the couple do not consummate the wedding in the room while guests are waiting outside.

A great image you can get here is to have the couple look back over their shoulders at you as they enter the room. Another great picture is one of the two witnesses who stand outside of the door.



THE PHOTOGRAPHS AFTER THE CHUPPAH

So far, you have been working almost nonstop for the last four to five hours. Now you really have to get yourself together for what has to be the most demanding photo session you will have worked. Here is the game plan: You will need to get the couple with each side of the family, and have parents, grandparents, and married sibling group shots. You will also be looking at some very large group shots with thirty to fifty relatives. At the end, you will want just the couple by themselves. All this needs to happen within a thirty to forty-five minute window, as everyone is waiting to get to the reception and start the first dance set. This can't happen until you have finished taking the photos.

Two things work very well for this, a ladder and a whistle, which I bring to every wedding. The ladder allows me to shoot from high up, giving me a better shot at getting everyone in the image. The whistle is to keep me from yelling to get everyone's attention.

When photographing a group, getting the little ones to look at you can be a challenge. Tell the adults to look at you and not worry about the children. You can also use a small LCD flashlight keychain to get the kids' attention.







Facing page and above—For the most part, you will only have ten minutes with the bride and groom, so try for simple poses that you can execute quickly without much setup time for lights and such. For me, one Quantum T5 on a rolling stand is fast and moves quickly with me.

This is where you really need to have a sense of humor and keep yourself in control. The family is all excited about the wedding that just took place, and everyone is talking and hugging. You, on the other hand, want to make them look good for the picture.

My advice is to be firm but smile the whole time. Don't look like you are rushing them and going frantic, but get it moving. For the most part, you'll never get fantastic group shots; you'll need to settle for good ones. A second shooter is a big help here because he or she can help arrange the group (without touching the opposite gender).

You will want to pay attention to your timeline, ensuring that you have the time you need to get photos of the couple alone. The kind of images you will get depends largely on how comfortable the couple is. You should ask, prior to the event, if the couple is comfortable touching one another. It's okay to ask for them to touch if you're not sure of their position in the matter, but do not push the issue. You must respect their modesty. If no touching is what they want, then you must work with it.

If the couple will not touch, you can still have the groom hold the flowers with the bride to bring them closer. It is highly recommended that you



Keeping the camera in manual mode and leaving the flash in TTL mode has worked well for us. This way, the camera is not thrown off by the black suits. Also, using a ladder keeps you from getting beat up by the dancing, while still being able to shoot down into the crowds.

ask everyone to leave the room except for you, a second photographer (if there is one), and the videographer. I have found that if you can get the couple alone, out of the sight of their guests and families, they may relax a bit more and give you a little more latitude.

Having finished this set of images, you will need to get to the main reception hall and get yourself set up for the entrance of the bride and groom for the first dance set. You can leave equipment with the wedding caterer, who most likely will be hovering nearby to keep things on schedule. You may only have three to five minutes to get in place, with your camera ready, and to prepare to start shooting upon their entrance.

THE RECEPTION

Sometime during the day, you should have taken the time to get your lights set up in the main reception hall. This can be done as soon as you arrive or during a break when you switch from the bride's side to the groom's side. In either case, you will want your lights and ladder in place beforehand, so all you have to do is walk in and take your position.

After much experimentation and fine-tuning, we have come up with a very balanced lighting technique that has repeatedly given us excellent results, regardless of the size of the hall, existing lighting, and color balance. Prior to having cameras that gave excellent images at high ISOs, we were forced to use monolights on light stands at relatively high output values, with AC-powered cords, and use either a bare bulb, bounced to the ceiling, or a white umbrella.

Since these light sources were set very high, our cameras were set for standard ISOs of 600 to 800 for the most part. We kept our cameras' white balance set to flash. By the way, we still shoot JPEGs and will continue to do so.

With our newer cameras, we are very comfortable at ISOs in the 2500 to 3200 range and shoot this way during the entire reception.

With our newer cameras, we are very comfortable at ISOs in the 2500 to 3200 range and shoot this way during the entire reception. Using more of the available room light (mostly tungsten), we now use less in terms of room lights. We now have two light stands, each with two Quantum T5s mounted on top at 45 degree angles, using wide-angle diffusers and color gels (CTO) to balance the light to the room. We shoot with our cameras in manual mode, with an on-camera flash (TTL mode) with an Omni-Bounce and gel inside.

What does this give us? The room is color- and light-source balanced, and the Quantums are set at $\frac{1}{4}$ power using the Turbo 2 batteries. We can now set up lights anywhere without AC cords. We used to tape our light stands to the ground, but people would find a way to trip over them and knock them over. The stands we now use have very wide, wheeled bases, so this is no longer an issue. Our current setup gives us the best possible lighting for very large venues. The camera stays in manual mode and is not fooled by the black hats and coats we will be photographing.

The reception at the Orthodox Jewish wedding is broken into several segments—the first dance set, the meal, the second dance set, and the seven blessings at the end.

The First Dance Set. The first dance set is started when the bride and groom enter the reception hall. Each goes to one side to dance with the respective male and female relatives and guests. Typically, the bride's sisters and friends form a tunnel with decorative arches by the doorway for the bride and groom (or bride and her mom) to run through. During this entrance and the first dance set, there are several images you will want to get.

During the first dance set, the fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and grandmothers each take a turn dancing with the respective bride and groom. These are important shots, as they may not be around for the second dance set. Also, keep an eye out for an opportunity to photograph the rabbis dancing with the groom. Some of these rabbis are very honored guests,



and it means a lot to the families to have a photo of them dancing at the wedding.

The first dance set can last up to forty-five minutes, so be sure you have memory and battery to last through the event. There will be a lot going on, and at times, it can look like a three-ring circus. Be prepared to get it all—jumping rope, juggling, fire acts, costumes, leaps, and gymnastics. This is not limited to the young only, for many a rabbi has been photographed juggling and jumping rope.

If you have two shooters (highly recommended), then you will have someone working the women's side as well. If it's just you, then working off a ladder placed right next to the mehitza (divider between men and women) allows you to look over at the other side and get your shots using a fair amount of zoom. In fact, even with two shooters this works well and offers some creative, dramatic shots.

During this entire first dance set, you must look out for all types of activity. Often on the women's side, the bride will stand with a parasol with ribbons while her friends dance around her.

Above—Having a second shooter in position at the end of the tunnel, working at a low angle, can allow for some dramatic entrance pictures of the couple. **Facing page**—If you are using a ladder, be prepared to move out into the dance floor for some ultrawide shots of the goings on from waist level. It is important when you are in the midst of it all to check your lens for water spots or other stuff (sweat). I have shot an entire reception, only to find out afterward that my lens was dirty with sweat from the people who were dancing around me. This happens more often than you would think.





This page and facing page—Here are some additional images depicting some of the festivities that take place during a Jewish wedding.

When the dance set begins to wind down, try to get all of the women into one big group photo. These group shots are great, as most of these women went to school together and are about the same age.

Right after the first dance set, the bride and groom are usually lifted and carried over to their seats for their meal. They will wash their hands with a blessing and then make a blessing over the bread. All of this is expected to be photographed as well.





Facing page—(Top) Group shot taken just after first dance set. (Bottom) You will need to work quickly when creating these table shots. The meal is not a long sit-down event with speeches, toasts, etc. Guests will be getting up for a second dance set right after they finish eating. **Below**—Be sure to get a detail shot of the bencher for the wedding album.

Now everyone will sit down to their meal. The men may be seated separate from the women. More Modern Orthodox weddings may have mixed seating or a combination of both.

Table photos are a must at any Orthodox wedding and are usually the least desired task for any photographer. With weddings of up to four hundred guests, you could be looking at forty tables. My best advice is to shoot wide and not worry about getting everyone to stand up, as this will probably not happen. If need be, shoot half a table at a time, but work quickly as the second dance set will start, and you will not get all of the table shots.

On the tables, you will find prayer books that are used for the blessings at the end of the wedding. These usually have the bride and groom's name





graphically imprinted. These make excellent detail shots for the album, so you will want to photograph one of them.

The Second Dance Set and the Mezinka. After the meal, the second dance set will start up. You will basically be looking at much of the same as the first dance set. There probably will be less people on the floor, so you may actually have better conditions for selective shots. This will go on until dessert is served, and then only a handful of guests will keep dancing. By now, the wedding will start to wind down. The last item to watch for is the Birkat HaMazon (grace after meals) and then the Sheva Brachot (seven blessings).

If the bride or the groom is the last child to be married, then a special dance (mezinka) with the parents of that child is performed. The parents are seated in the middle of the dance floor with laurel wreaths placed on their heads. Wedding guests line up to give a hearty mazel tov while a Yiddish song is played. Sometimes you'll find the mother get up and start sweeping with a broom as if sweeping the last child out the door. It is a major milestone to have all of one's children married off, and the dance is a beautiful custom.

Sheva Brachot. After the grace after meals, the last event to be photographed is the Sheva Brachot (seven blessings). There is a blessing over the glass of wine, and another glass of wine will be carried to different hon-

Above—The mezinka is performed when the parents have married off their last child. The sweeping of the broom represents this joyful occasion. **Facing page**—The Sheva Brachot, a blessing over the wine, is an important event to photograph.





ored guests who will hold the glass and recite a blessing as well. This is continued until all of the blessings are recited.

The glass is then brought to the head table where the couple is seated, and the wine is poured from one glass to another and mixed so there are now two glasses of wine that the bride and groom will drink from. These are all great images to be taken, and the last photo you will have of the couple is of them drinking from the two glasses of wine. Getting a photo of the couple drinking wine together is important, but you should let them drink the wine without any interference from you, then pose the couple for a photograph with the wine glasses.

There you have it, an Orthodox wedding from start to finish. What is so special about these weddings? For me, the nonstop activities and all of the rituals before and after the chuppah are what make this a labor of love. By far, the badeken is, to me, the most emotional event of the day, and this shows in our photos time and time again.

The couple should be allowed to drink from the wine before you take this picture. This is the last photo of the wedding, and now is also a good time to say your goodbyes before all the guests come to say goodbye as well.

4. Conservative and Reform Jewish Weddings

If you have not yet read the chapter on Orthodox weddings, it is advised that you read it before reading this chapter. All of the rituals and customs you will find in the Conservative and Reform weddings originate from the Orthodox wedding.

Photographing Conservative and Reform weddings follows many of the same guidelines as the Orthodox weddings, ketubah, badeken, and chuppah. What you will find different is the inclusion of women in these rituals. For example, it is common for the groom and bride to both sign the

ketubah, which is unheard of in the Orthodox sect. Additionally, you will find some rituals combined together to become one. This is the case with the badeken, as it comes immediately after the signing of the ketubah.

By far, the biggest difference between these events and Orthodox weddings (for the photographer especially) is the willingness of the bride and groom to see each other

before the chuppah. Surprisingly enough, there is no Jewish law that prevents the bride and groom from seeing each other beforehand, but this has become the custom for Orthodox families.

Having the bride and groom together helps tremendously with the photography, but at the same time, there is something lost in the magic of the moment when the groom sees the bride in her wedding dress for the first time. To capture this special feeling, I have devised my own ritual, which I call the Back to Back.

THE BACK TO BACK RITUAL

To help bring the same level of emotion to the Conservative/Reform wedding that is found during the badeken of the Orthodox wedding, I have created the following ritual, which has become very popular among my clients. To make this work, the bride and groom agree not to see each

The biggest difference between these events and Orthodox weddings is the willingness of the bride and groom to see each other before the chuppah.

other the entire day until they are brought together for the first time by the photographer for the Back to Back session.



The entire wedding party and immediate family are brought together in an area where they form a semicircle around the bride, who then stands in the middle. The groom is then escorted (walking backward) by the best man until he is standing just behind the bride. They stand like this, not seeing each other but feeling the other's presence, for what seems like an eternity. About thirty seconds of this is all that's needed, and then they are told to turn and face each other. You stand off to the side and just fire away as you capture the emotions of the bride and groom, and more importantly, the expressions on the faces of the families watching this take place right before them.

The entire wedding party and immediate family are brought together in an area where they form a semicircle around the bride, who stands in the middle.

In Conservative and Reform Jewish weddings, it is acceptable for the bride and groom to see one another prior to the ceremony at the Chuppah. This is rarely the case in an Orthodox wedding. This allows the photographer more time to get images of the bride and groom together.







When capturing the expressions on the faces of the bride and groom as they see each other for the first time on their wedding day, don't neglect to capture the emotion on the faces of the couple's friends and family.







Facing page—The signing of the ketubah is a more intimate event in a Conservative or Reform wedding than in an Orthodox wedding. **Above**—Be sure to get some close-up shots of the signing hands, in addition to the wider shots of the witnesses and immediate family. These images are a great addition to a magazine-style album design.

Once the bride and groom have recovered, have them go together to greet the wedding party. Here again, you will get hugs and tears that make for some of the best wedding images. I have had couples tell me that these are by far some of the most cherished photos they have from their wedding.

Now that the couples are together, you can work the photography with your customary style of shooting. These couples will have no problem touching or kissing in front of the camera. Your only limitation will be time, as you still have the ketubah signing and badeken before the chuppah.

THE KETUBAH SIGNING AND THE BADEKEN

Unlike the large crowds of guests at the Orthodox wedding, here you will find the rabbi will take the couple and immediate family off to the side in a secluded area and go over the meaning of the ketubah with the couple. The couple will sign the ketubah as the parents look on. There will also be two witnesses; they will sign the ketubah as well. Normally this would only be men, but today it is acceptable for women to sign as witnesses within the Conservative and Reform communities.

The ketubah today has become a piece of art that is prominently displayed in the couple's home. You will want to make sure to get some good detail shots of this as well, which can be incorporated into the album de-



sign. This is best done just before the signing, since many of these ketubahs are large and are protected by Plexiglas panes or cellophane after they are signed.

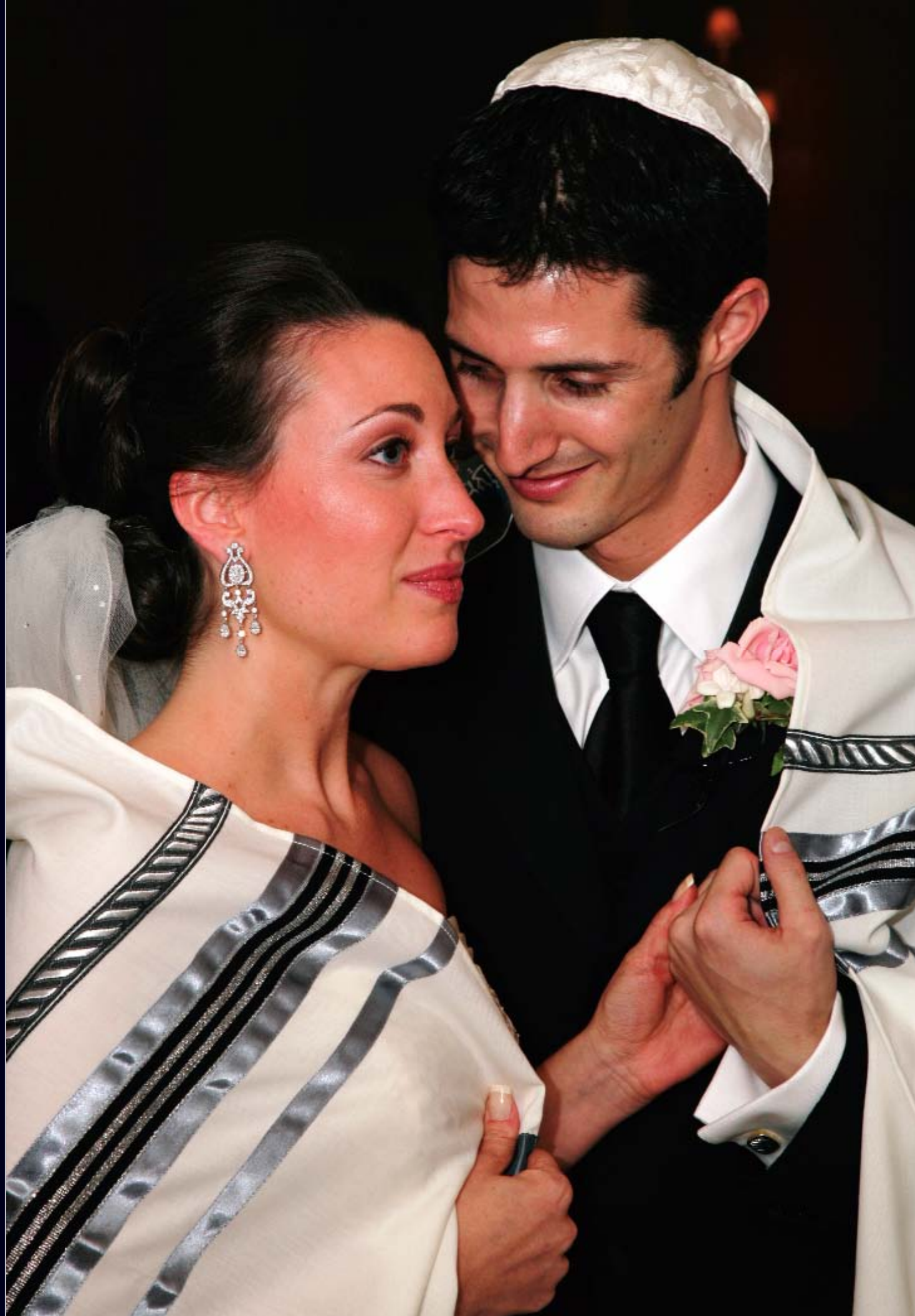
The badeken has now become a part of the ketubah signing, and it is customary for it to take place at the same time, following the signing of the ketubah.

With the ketubah signing and badeken completed, the wedding processional and ceremony will get underway shortly. For the most part, this will be familiar to any wedding photographer. The chuppah at the Conservative/Reform wedding is the same as in the Orthodox wedding, but the feeling is not quite the same. Here the rabbi will be more concerned about the decorum of the wedding ceremony, whereas before, almost anything was allowed.

THE CHUPPAH

Generally speaking, Conservative/Reform rabbis will be more restrictive when it comes to photographing during the actual wedding ceremony under the chuppah. The issue of using flash or moving around needs to be discussed with the rabbi prior to meeting under the chuppah. I will say, I generally take one quarter of the number of images at these weddings, as

Above—Ketubah and badeken are together at the Reform wedding. **Facing page**—German tradition of covering the couple in a tallit (prayer shawl) during the wedding ceremony.





compared to the Orthodox ones. The rabbi will be reading all of the blessings here, so do not look for any guests to be invited up to recite one of the blessings.

There is a tradition that has been primarily of German and Sephardic origin where the bride and groom will be wrapped in a tallit (prayer shawl) while under the chuppah. This is a trend that seems to be finding its way to more and more non-Orthodox Jewish weddings. I think this has become a way to add pizzazz to the wedding chuppah and, of course, it looks great in pictures.

THE RECEPTION

The reception at the Conservative/Reform wedding will include customs that most wedding photographers are familiar with, such as toasts, a garter toss, bouquet toss, and cake cutting. The only difference you will encounter is having the blessing over the bread and wine. Usually grandfathers are honored with this, and they are called up to the dance floor to make the blessings.

THE HORA

The hora is a circle dance that is now a part of every Jewish celebration including mitzvahs and weddings. Since the Conservative/Reform wedding

Above—Have the caterer place the table used for the blessings in a location that works well for you and the guests. **Facing page**—Be prepared for the hora, as it is an important event to photograph. Shooting from a wide angle will give the image impact.



has men and women together, all take part in the hora. Soon you'll find chairs brought to the dance floor, and the bride and groom will be lifted into the air as everyone dances around.

Parents of the bride and groom are also lifted in chairs, so be sure to stay with the action all the way through. Don't forget to take shots of the guests' faces as this is happening as well.

The rest of the wedding will be standard picture taking all the way to the end. There are no further customs or rituals to look out for, and as compared to the Orthodox wedding, the endings are much different.

With all of the beautiful rituals and customs that take place in the Orthodox wedding, there has become a blending of Orthodox rituals to the Conservative wedding. The Conservadox wedding allows for mixed couples, which is not found in the Orthodox wedding.

THE DETAIL SHOTS

Detail images add spice to any wedding album and should not be overlooked. At Jewish weddings (non-Orthodox) it is customary to have yamakas made for the wedding with the couple's name imprinted inside. This is given to the male guests to wear during the ceremony. Also, many families have Kiddush (sanctification prayer) cups that have become family heirlooms and are used for the blessings of the wine while under the chuppah. These should be included in the detail shots as well.



Be sure to add images of the Kiddush cups used during the wedding ceremony under the chuppah.

5. Albums for Jewish Weddings

So why devote a chapter to wedding albums? When it's all said and done, this is what a wedding photographer is working toward. To be able to capture images of the most important day in a couple's life that will be cherished and passed down to future generations is the end result for all of our hard work.

Ethnic and religious weddings of all types are rich in rituals and customs that reveal a story that goes back for centuries.

Ethnic and religious weddings of all types are rich in rituals and customs that reveal a story that goes back for centuries. To showcase and bring this story to life in images presented in a wedding album, using all of the tools at our disposal, is awesome.

For many families, traditional albums are the standard of what a wedding album should be. Flush mount or matted, it's all the same. However, we are seeing a trend, even among Orthodox families, to having a magazine-style or graphically designed album, making use of all of the images to tell the story of the couple's wedding day.

If you look at all the events that take place in the Jewish wedding, and all of the different types of images to be captured, it's no wonder why this magazine-style album is so popular.

Using a two-page spread, 10x20 inches, or even better, 12x24 inches, the story can be told with an artistic blending of photos, graphic design elements, and colors. Using the general guideline of three and a half images per side, or seven images per spread, a typical wedding can be portrayed in an album of twelve to fifteen pages.

Wedding packages for Orthodox weddings must have three albums for most families. This is considered the norm. We have taken it one step further to include albums for grandparents as well, which is not typical for most studios. With the availability of so many companies and types of albums out there, it is cost-effective today to do so.

Keep in mind that companion albums (identical versions of the couple's album) do not sell very well, as Orthodox families are rather large and each individual will want different pictures in their album.

There are always different tastes and budgets to consider when looking at album offerings you can supply. For the parents of a typical Orthodox family, there will be anywhere from three to seven weddings to pay for. Keep this in mind while you are putting your packages together for this market.

This brings me to the topic of proof prints. Many studios have opted to stop offering proof prints or have a soft-cover book created for all of the proof images. While this may work in some market segments, it will definitely not work for the Orthodox community. Proof prints are needed for them to pick and choose album selections, and we have even designed our proof prints to have the file number on the front so the proofs can be copied for distribution to the families.

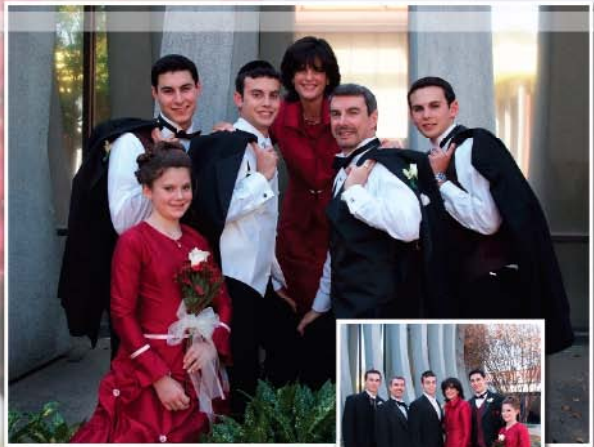
For those of you who are outsourcing your graphic album design work to designers, remember that they may not be accustomed to working with these images and may not understand the sequence of events. Providing a sequentially numbered set of images will give them the direction they need to keep the order of the day's events accurate.

Below and on the pages that follow, you'll find a sampling of pages taken from Jewish wedding albums.

Facing page—Modern Orthodox wedding albums feature clean lines that pull the images together for continuity in the spread. See how the images from all of the traditions, now assembled in the album, tell the story of the day.

For those of you who are outsourcing your graphic album design work to designers, remember that they may not be used to working with these images.





Family







Celebration



Friends



6. Equipment

It is assumed that readers of this book are professional photographers who have invested in all of the standard equipment, such as cameras, lenses, lights, etc. Most of these investments are based on a particular shooting style. I know that over the last couple of years, we have refined our gear to handle many of the challenges we face while photographing Jewish weddings.

Our biggest challenge has been properly exposing large venues with people dancing in two different areas or zones with as many as four hundred guests, many of whom are dressed in black suits and, in many cases, black hats. With our earlier digital cameras, ISO capability was limited. We would rarely venture past 800 ISO, and we therefore needed large light sources (two to four 400 watt-second monolights) to give us illumination for the entire dance floor. As far as color balance, our monolights were the most significant source of illumination when they fired, along with our own camera flashes, so our cameras were color balanced for flash. Of course, wherever we had light falloff, we ended up with a different color temperature.

A second problem was having these strong light sources over-illuminating parts of our images as we shot in the direction of the light. Having the lights up high (about ten to thirteen feet) helped, but only to a degree.

Our goal had always been to have balanced light throughout the room that matched the room's existing lights (incandescent for the most part) in color, as well as the ability for our strobes to recycle fast enough to keep up with our style of shooting.

One additional feature we needed was portability. With so many people dancing in such tight quarters, we need to be able to move our lights easily, so we didn't want to have to use AC-powered sources. Not having to

With so many people dancing in such tight quarters, we need to be able to move our lights easily, so we didn't want to have to use AC-powered sources.



worry about power sources or cords taped down allows for maximum flexibility.

With today's newer cameras we were able to come up with an ideal working arrangement. We shoot with Nikon D3 and D300 cameras that have exceptionally high ISO capability. With these cameras, we are comfortable shooting at 2,500 ISO, which now lets us use more of the available light in the room.

To give us good fill and some directed light, we now have two Quantum Qflashes, each with wide-angle diffusers (plastic domes that fit over the flash), mounted on a rolling light stand. These diffusers have color gels (CTOs) inside, so our lights more or less match the incandescent room lighting. Having the high ISO capability also lets us use very little flash power, so the Qflashes are set to only $\frac{1}{4}$

This is one of two portable lights with two heads, each fitted with wide-angle diffusers with gels inside. Each battery gives us four hundred cycles at $\frac{1}{4}$ power for both heads. Note the table in the background. This is where the tish will be set up for the wedding.

power output. With this low power setting, we can use a single Quantum Turbo 2 battery that powers two of the Qflashes and gives us about four hundred flashes per battery. We carry a spare battery on each stand, so effectively we are good for eight hundred flashes.

Our typical setup is two stands, each with two flashes mounted and battery packs attached. One is set up on the women's side, the other on the men's. The flash heads are angled at 45 degrees so we have full coverage of the dance floor.

MUST-HAVE ITEMS

I am sure many photographers are very well prepared, and may already have some, if not all, of these items with them as part of their gear. However, some may not, so here goes.

First-Aid Kit. This is a typical first-aid kit, but ours also has smelling salt in a break vial.

Our typical setup is two stands, each with two flashes mounted and battery packs attached. One is set up on the women's side, the other on the men's.

Sewing Kit. This has been used several times to fix dresses at the last minute. This includes double-sided tape. Women will know what to use this for.

Cleaning Kit. We are always sure to carry stain-removing wipes and pens so we can keep our subjects' clothing looking its best.

The groups of men dancing in tight quarters make it impossible to work close to the action. The ladder gives you the vantage point you need.

Water and Snacks. Water is so important, and just before I begin the shooting, I hydrate myself with at least four bottles of water. With all of the activity and demands on my body, water helps keep my muscles from cramping and becoming sore. The snacks are hardly ever needed, as there is always food during the badeken, but I bring them just in case.

My Yamaka. While I normally do not wear a yamaka everyday, I always wear one at Orthodox weddings out of respect. Having my own is more hygienic than using one at the venue, and it stays on my head better.

Job-Specific Clothing. For me this is not a problem, as I wear all black with an open collar on my shirt and black jacket. Women should dress modestly and should not wear clothing that shows bare shoulders, arms, or legs. Long skirts are acceptable, as are pants (slacks allow more freedom of movement). Women should wear only closed-toe shoes.

Ladder. I could not shoot a wedding without a ladder. During the dance sets, the groups of men dancing in tight quarters make it impossible to work close to the action. The ladder gives you the vantage point you

A ladder is a must-have item for Orthodox weddings. The videographer and I work side by side and can shoot in either direction (men's side or women's side).





need and keeps you out of the mix. Just be careful to set up out of the way so you don't get knocked over.

Cameras and Lenses. There is always a discussion among photographers about the number of cameras used and what you need for backup. There are always four cameras among the two of us. I depend on a wide-angle lens for many of the group shots and table shots, so there are two of these as well.

These are our must-haves. I am sure there will be other items that are indispensable to you.

My assistant and I carry four cameras between us so, in the event of an equipment malfunction, once-in-a-lifetime shots are not lost.

7. *Frequently Asked Questions*

In this day and age there are search engines and quick reference guides available for just about any and every subject matter. We have become accustomed to getting answers to our questions ASAP.

I have gathered the questions I am most often asked by my peers and have answered them here for your reference.

Q. Do you have to be Jewish to photograph a Jewish wedding?

A. No, but it couldn't hurt! The more Orthodox the wedding, the greater understanding you must have as to what will be happening and what is a

A wide-angle lens adds impact to the image of a bride in front of a chapel as the sun sets.





must-get photo. Similar to any community of people, being able to fit in helps tremendously. I have witnessed many weddings where guests from the hotel where the wedding is being held pop in for a quick look, and they end up being invited to dance.

Your understanding of the events, and the confidence you will exhibit by knowing what to expect will be all that is needed.

Above—Rabbi filling in the last letters in the wording of the ketubah. This custom is carried out at the tish on the wedding day. **Facing page**—This image shows the beautiful Orthodox bride and her bouquet to best effect. The blurred background makes the subject pop.

Q. What are the must-have shots I need to get at the wedding?

A. All Jewish weddings, regardless of how Orthodox they are, will have several key elements that you will be expected to capture. Some of these happen very quickly with little warning, so you must be aware of the events taking place. The essentials are:

- The veiling of the bride
- The drinking of wine by the couple from the Kiddush cups
- Placing the ring on the bride's finger
- Breaking the glass under the chuppah





Q. Is it true that the bride and groom consummate the wedding right after the chuppah?

A. This was at one time the custom, but not today. The term for this is yichud (coming together). For the most part, the couple is left alone for about ten minutes, which is meant to be symbolic of the early custom from before.

There are times when the couple ends up taking too long, leaving the guests waiting for them before the festivities can begin. It is important for

Above—Here, the bride watches as the groom shows the wedding band to the witnesses at the chuppah while he declares that he has purchased the ring on his own and intends to take care of this woman as his wife by placing the ring on her finger. **Facing page**—An Orthodox couple under the chuppah during the wedding ceremony. Note that the couple is not touching. This is customary among orthodox couples.



you to ask the parents to help keep them on time, as you will begin taking photographs of the couple and family once they come out of the room.

Many photographers feel hindered by the short amount of time given to photograph the couple and family right after the yichud. For most events, only thirty minutes are planned for, and if the couple stays longer this cuts into your time.

Q. Will the rabbi allow me to take photos during the wedding ceremony? If so, do I have to stay in one place?

A. This is a great question and one that is usually of most concern for the photographer. Surprisingly, the more Orthodox the wedding, the greater



A Conservative couple under the chuppah. Note that they are holding hands during the ceremony. Touching is acceptable during a Conservative ceremony.

This brave bride was willing to venture outside for natural-light images on this 20-degree winter day. Jewish Orthodox weddings take place year round.



freedom you have. This probably has a lot to do with the number of people called to the chuppah during the Orthodox wedding. There is a lot of activity, and sometimes you can have as many as twenty or more people in or under the chuppah. In fact, is not unusual to even have a guest join in right next to you taking photos or video as well. Reform and Conservative rabbis are a little more formal and many times ask for little movement or no flash used during the actual ceremony.



Bouquet tosses are uncommon at a Jewish wedding, though the practice is sometimes carried out at Reform or Conservative weddings.

Q. Will there be a throwing of the bouquet by the bride, or a garter toss?

A. This is not common at an Orthodox wedding because men and women are separated for much of the wedding day. You may find these practices carried out at Reform and Conservative weddings, but not as often as you may think.

Q. Is it true that Orthodox wedding ceremonies take place outdoors?

A. There is some truth to this, as it is a custom of many communities to have the chuppah and wedding ceremony outside under the sky, and in some cases under the stars, depending on the time of the year. You should be prepared for this since, in winter, this can get pretty uncomfortable. You may need to wear gloves and a winter coat while photographing the wedding.

Q. Why does the groom break a glass at the end of the wedding?

A. Of all of the Jewish customs this has to be the most well known by people throughout the world. There are many explanations for this custom, but by far the most accepted explanation has to do with the destruction of the holy temple in Jerusalem. By breaking the glass, the couple and guests are reminded that no matter how joyous the occasion they are still without the holy temple. It is also customary that just before breaking the glass, someone sings the phrase, “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my foremost joy.”

By breaking the glass, the couple and guests are reminded that no matter how joyous the occasion they are still without the holy temple.

Q. Do all Jewish weddings take place in a synagogue?

A. Though many weddings take place in a synagogue, this is not a requirement. Weddings can take place anywhere, and many venues specialize in hosting Orthodox weddings, providing kosher catering or allowing a kosher caterer access to the facility using their own personnel and staff.

Q. How are a Jewish wedding and a Jewish Orthodox wedding different?

A. There are several key differences between the events, but by far the separation of the men and women throughout the wedding day stands out the most. During the ceremony, men will sit on one side, with women on the other. Dancing will be separate as well, and there will be a divider of some sort between the two dance areas.

Another major difference will be the type of dancing (circle dance) and performances, called shtick (Yiddish term meaning “act” or “cut up”). You will find juggling with swords, jump roping, fire breathing, hats on fire, acts, trampolines, high jumps—anything and everything to entertain the wedding couple and make everyone happy. For a photographer, this is great

for action shots but is also very demanding. With all of this going on, it is very hard for one shooter to get it all. Two photographers are a must for any Orthodox wedding.

Facing page—When working with an Orthodox bride, be patient and understanding. She will likely have been fasting all day. Also, she may be uncomfortable working with a male photographer in such close proximity. Take your time, and you will be rewarded with natural-looking images.

Q. Must male photographers wear a yamaka (head covering) during the wedding?

A. Though it is not a requirement that the male photographer wear a yamaka, it is considered to be respectful. This is especially true when the wedding takes place in a synagogue.

Q. How much time should I plan for to photograph a Jewish wedding?

A. Plan on anywhere from six to ten hours for all of the day's events. The good news is that all of the day's activities take place in one location. Most of the weddings I photograph are planned around a ten-hour timeline. Three hours are set aside to photograph the wedding families prior to the chuppah. This is needed due to the large families with many children and grandchildren, all of which have to be in large group photos. Two hours are set aside for photographing the ketubah, veiling, and wedding ceremony. Finally, five hours are allotted for photographing the wedding reception, including the dance sets, grace at the end of the reception, and blessings.

It can also be challenging to get table shots of as many as four hundred guests. However, this is one of those must haves for any Orthodox wedding.

There you have it—a ten-hour day. For non-Orthodox weddings, six to eight hours is the norm.

Q. What is the hardest part of shooting Orthodox weddings?

A. In addition, you may find that you have very little time to photograph the wedding couple. It is customary for the man and woman not to see each other prior to the chuppah. This gives very little time after the chuppah to get family shots with the bride and groom, as well as couple shots of them alone. It can also be challenging to get table shots of as many as four hundred guests. However, this is one of those must haves for any Orthodox wedding. Wide angle lenses are a essential for this.

Q. What is the best part of photographing Orthodox weddings?

A. The best part, by far, is the excitement and nonstop action. There is very little downtime at these weddings. All of the dancing and performances make for a great but long day.



Q. I have heard that alcohol is sometimes not served at Orthodox weddings. Why?

A. There is no religious reason not to serve alcohol. The availability of alcoholic beverages will likely depend on the size of the wedding and the budget the families are working with. Many Orthodox weddings have as many as four hundred guests, and to serve alcohol in addition to the meal may be cost prohibitive. From my point of view, this is great, as I have never had to deal with a drunken family member or guest at a wedding. Additionally, everyone is having such a great time, and they don't need the alcohol to be happy.

Many Orthodox weddings have as many as four hundred guests, and to serve alcohol in addition to the meal may be cost prohibitive.

Q. Is there a bridal party at Orthodox weddings?

A. There are no bridesmaids or groomsmen in Orthodox weddings. At the chuppah you will find siblings, parents, and a shomar (chaperone).

Q. How can hotels host Orthodox weddings? I thought the food had to be kosher.

A. Yes, the food at an Orthodox wedding must be kosher. Therefore, many hotels allow kosher caterers to come in with everything they need to set up a kosher meal. This is no small feat when you consider the vast number of guests in attendance.

Q. Do I need to dress in a special way when photographing an Orthodox wedding?

A. For men, a black suit and shirt works best. Modesty is key for women. Female photographers should not show bare shoulders, arms, or legs. Long skirts are acceptable, as are pants. Closed-toe shoes are a must.

Q. Is it true that table shots are a must have for Orthodox weddings?

A. Yes they are. Plan to work fast, as you could be looking at forty or more tables at some of these large events.

Glossary

Aliyah. Literally, “going up.” Refers to one’s going up to the Torah for a portion of the Torah reading.

Aron HaKodesh. Holy Ark used to store Torah scrolls in the synagogue.

Aufruf. Calling up the groom (and the bride in liberal circles) to the Torah on the Shabbat before the wedding.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah. A rite of passage moving a child into the responsibility of adulthood regarding the mitzvot, established for boys at age thirteen and and girls at age twelve (though most liberal synagogues do not make a distinction in age between boys and girls). The transition is automatic and is not dependent upon ceremony. Ideally, the bar/bat mitzvah is an entry into formal Jewish education, since historically parents provided education in the early years. The ceremony for boys as we know it probably dates back to the Middle Ages, with girls’ ceremony not being practiced until the early 1900s in the United States (still limited in some liberal synagogues and often nonexistent in Orthodox congregations). In its early years, Reform Judaism generally discarded bar mitzvah in favor of confirmation, but it has been reintroduced over the last generations.

Bedecken. The veiling of the bride, done by the groom, which represents from the modesty of Rebecca in Genesis 24:65.

Berakhah. A blessing, specifically one with a technical formula (e.g., “Baruch ata...”).

Bimah. Literally, “high place.” Refers to the raised platform (or pulpit) in the front of a synagogue sanctuary.

Birkat HaMazon. Grace after meals, emphasizing the sacred character of meals. Also referred to as “bentching.”

Brit Milah. The covenant of circumcision, which is usually performed on a male child in his eighth day of life.

Cantor. In Hebrew, “chazzan.” The person who chants the liturgy during worship services.

Challah. Hebrew for “dough offering.” Bread used for ritual purposes as a partitive for Shabbat. It is in the form of a braid to represent the mystical Shabbat bride’s hair, or it can be round for Rosh Hashana to represent the cycle of the year.

Chattan. Literally, “groom.”

Chuppah. A bridal canopy, used during the wedding ceremony and forming a sacred space in the center of the bimah. It may have its origin in the times when weddings were held outside and an effort was made to isolate the wedding from the hustle and bustle of street life. It also symbolically represents the bridal chamber, where the couple would go after the wedding to consummate the marriage, fulfilling the obligations of yichud.

Confirmation. A ceremony that takes place during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, originally introduced by the Reform movement to provide an alternative to the bar/bat mitzvah, now usually at the end of the tenth grade after bar/bat mitzvah. Early reformers believed children were too young to accept the responsibilities of adulthood and wanted an egalitarian ceremony for girls and boys. Confirmation was borrowed from Protestant Christianity.

Consecration. A ceremony introduced by the Reform movement as the time when the child marks the beginning of his formal Jewish education, usually associated with the Jewish holidays of Sukkot or Simchat Torah.

Daven. To pray. The traditional Jewish posture of prayer.

Devar Torah. Literally, “a word of Torah.” A teaching of the sacred text either within the context of worship or not.

Fasting. An act abstaining from food and drink, mandated during the observance of several holidays, as a means of reflecting upon one’s life. Not intended as punishment, it was historically connected to mourning customs, which, when engaged by an entire community, might “move the hand of G-d” by bringing on, for example, rain for farming.

Haftarah. Weekly reading on Shabbat and holidays from the Prophets, following the Torah reading. Its theme reflects the weekly Torah reading.

Havdalah. The ritual (using wine, candle, and spices) marking the end of Shabbat and holidays and the beginning of the rest of the week. It acknowledges the distinction between the holy and normative or the sacred and profane in time.

Kabbalah. Literally, “that which is received.” A reference to the inherited tradition, especially when it is placed with another word, such as “Shalshet HaKabbalah” (the chain of tradition). This term also refers to the general mystical tradition in Judaism.

Kallah. Hebrew term for bride.

Ketubah. The traditional marriage contract, which spells out the contractual responsibilities of the groom to the bride.

Kiddush. Sanctification prayer over wine for specific Jewish holidays and Shabbat.

Kippa. Hebrew for headcovering or skullcap, also called a yamaka. The kippa is worn in recognition that G-d is above you and shows reverence to G-d.

Kittel. Robe-like white garment worn by the groom under the chuppah, during the High Holiday period, at the Passover seder, and when buried.

Kosher. Dietary laws that regulate the life of an individual Jew. “Glatt kosher” is used today to refer to a generally higher or stricter standard of kosher.

Maftir. The additional (eighth) Aliyah and reading of the Torah in which the last few lines are repeated, typically reserved for youths at their bar/bat mitzvah who then recited the Haftarah. Variations may occur in liberal congregations.

Mazel. Luck.

Mazel Tov. Good luck or congratulations.

Mechitzah. A divider used in synagogues and gatherings to separate men from women.

Menorah. Seven-branched candelabrum used in the ancient temple. The word is used to designate a lightbulb in Modern Hebrew and the synagogue Shabbat candelabra. It generally refers to the special menorah used for Hannukah.

Minhagim. Customs.

Minyan. The quorum of ten adults (men only in traditional Judaism) required for the reciting of prayers limited to community recitation.

Mitzvah (Plural, mitzvot). Refers to a specifically designated set of six hundred and thirteen commandments (both positive and negative) traditionally acknowledged to have been given by G-d or decreed by the rabbis. Generally used to refer to a good deed (mitzvah).

Omer. First sheaf cut during the barley harvest, which was offered in the temple as a sacrifice on the second day of Passover. The counting of the omer (sefirat ha'omer) is the period of time between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot. Its origins are complex and reflect the agricultural life of the Jewish people. A state of mourning exists during this time where certain observances are maintained, such as refraining from cutting hair. Wedding are prohibited during this period, except on the thirty-third day.

Parshah. The division of the Torah, the weekly Torah portions.

Rabbi. Hebrew for “my master.” A term used during the first century as a mode of address to authoritative teachers who were ordained members of the Jewish senate. Community religious leaders whose office developed in order to teach and judge, a result of the introductions of the notion that oral law and the disintegration of the power of the priesthood with the destruction of the temple. Today, rabbis are generally more localized to synagogues.

Rosh Chodesh. The first day of the new Jewish month, celebrated as a minor holy day. It is observed for one day or two days (depending on the month).

Shabbat. The Sabbath, also known as Shabbos, observed from sunset Friday evening to sundown Saturday evening, marked by rest, worship, and study. One who traditionally observes the legal requirements of Shabbat is called shomer Shabbat or shomer Shabbos.

Shalom. Usually translated as “peace,” “hello,” or “goodbye,” it really refers to wholeness and completeness. The world is not whole or complete without peace and tranquility; hence the transfer of terms. The sense of hello and goodbye developed as abbreviated forms of the greeting or inquiry, “Is your clan at peace?”

Sheva Berakhot. Part of a traditional weeklong ceremony, following a wedding, at which time berakhot are recited during Birkat HaMazon. This is a cluster of seven blessings recited over a cup of wine at every wedding ceremony.

Siddur. Prayerbook, from the Hebrew word for order, because it establishes that proper order for the recitation of prayers.

Simchah(s). A happy, joyful occasion, usually a family life-cycle event, such as a bar/bat mitzvah or a wedding.

Spice Box. Ritual object used to keep spices (besamim) for use during Havdallah.

Streimel. Hat, usually fur-trimmed, worn by Hasidic Jews as adopted from Polish gentlemen of the eighteenth century.

Synagogue. Called “shul” in Yiddish and often referred to as “temple” in more liberal circles, this is the central house of worship for the Jewish community following the destruction of the ancient temple.

Tallit. Prayer shawl. Reminiscent of the robe-like garment worn by our desert ancestors. Four fringes (tzitzit) are attached to remind us of our responsibilities to G-d. The shawl is worn at morning prayer and is also commonly used as the cloth in a chuppah.

Tefillah. Plural, tefillot. Prayers referring generally to worship.

Tefillin. Phylacteries, or prayer boxes, strapped to the head and arm, worn during daily morning prayers, but not on holidays or Shabbat. They are a sign of the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people.

Temple. Refers to both the ancient sacrificial center and central edifice for divine worship in Jerusalem. The First Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. and the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. Today, this is the site of the Dome of the Rock, a Moslem mosque. Used also by Reform Jews as interchangeable with synagogue because the early Reformers rejected a return to Jerusalem if it meant a condemnation of the diaspora.

Tena'im. The marriage engagement is formalized by tena'im, the signing of a legal document that sets forth the following conditions: the commitment to marriage, the financial resources each partner will bring to the marriage, the responsibility of each family to the other, and the penalties to be paid if either side were to break off the engagement.

Trop. Yiddish term for the notes of cantillation that direct the reader in chanting the Torah and Haftarah.

Wimpel. A Torah binding used to hold the scrolls together. Made from swaddling clothes of an infant and worn at the brit milah, it is traditionally given to the synagogue in honor of a boy's first birthday. It is sewn together and embroidered with his name, birth date, and a prayer for him.

Yad. Literally, "arm" or "hand." A stick with a hand at the tip used as a pointer for the reading of Torah so that one's own hand does not touch the scroll.

Yichud. The symbolic consummation of one's marriage, just following the wedding ceremony, symbolically represented by the chuppah. Many communities allow for private time just after the ceremony in order to recognize it.

Yiddish. High German with a mix of words borrowed from other languages, depending on where the Yiddish is spoken. A folk language associated with Eastern European Jews.

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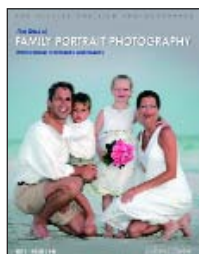
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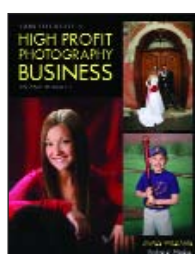
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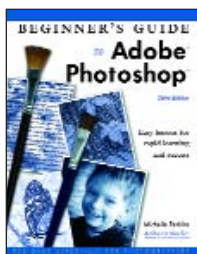
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Use natural light alone or with flash fill, barebulb, and strobes to shoot perfect portraits all day long. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color photos, diagrams, index, order no. 1821.



BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ADOBE® PHOTOSHOP®, 3rd Ed.

Michelle Perkins

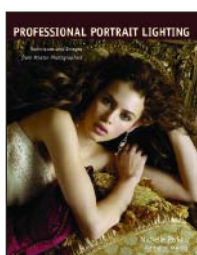
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THE BEST OF PROFESSIONAL DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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MASTER POSING GUIDE FOR CHILDREN'S PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

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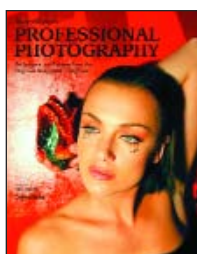
Create perfect portraits of infants, tots, kids, and teens. Includes techniques for standing, sitting, and floor poses for boys and girls, individuals, and groups. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 305 color images, order no. 1826.



WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER'S HANDBOOK

Bill Hurter

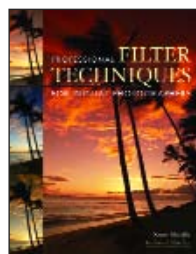
Learn to produce images with technical proficiency and superb, unbridled artistry. Includes images and insights from top industry pros. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 180 color photos, 10 screen shots, index, order no. 1827.



RANGEFINDER'S PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

edited by Bill Hurter

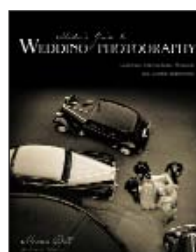
Editor Bill Hurter shares over one hundred "recipes" from *RangeFinder's* popular cookbook series, showing you how to shoot, pose, light, and edit fabulous images. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 150 color photos, index, order no. 1828.



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MASTER LIGHTING GUIDE FOR COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

Robert Morrissey

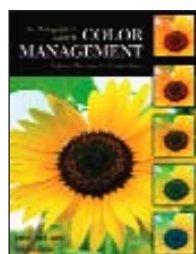
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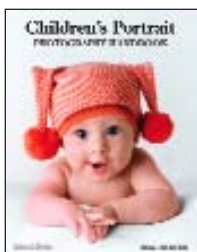
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CHILDREN'S PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY HANDBOOK

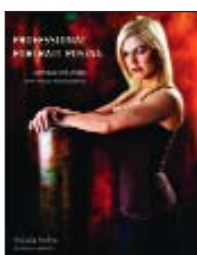
Bill Hurter

Packed with inside tips from industry leaders, this book shows you the ins and outs of working with some of photography's most challenging subjects. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color images, index, order no. 1840.



JEFF SMITH'S LIGHTING FOR OUTDOOR AND LOCATION PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

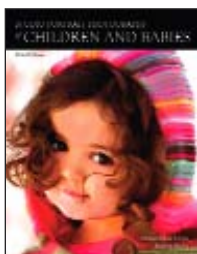
Learn how to use light throughout the day—indoors and out—and make location portraits a highly profitable venture for your studio. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 170 color images, index, order no. 1841.



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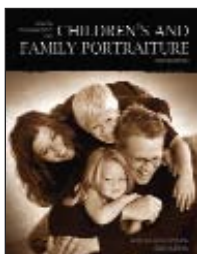
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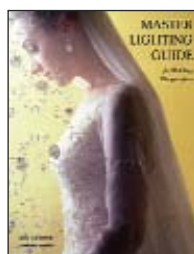
Bill Hurter

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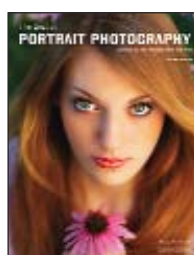
Use architectural and natural elements to support the pose, maximize the flow of the session, and create refined, artful poses for individual subjects and groups—indoors or out. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 150 color photos, index, order no. 1851.



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Bill Hurter

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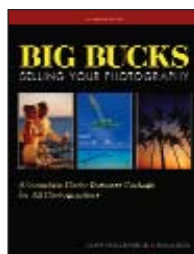
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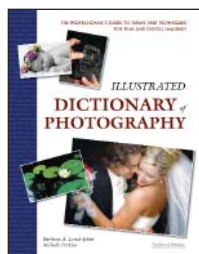
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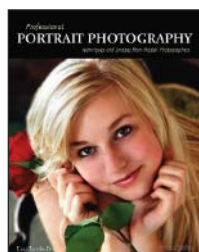
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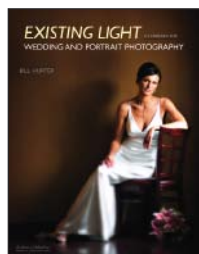


PROFESSIONAL PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

TECHNIQUES AND IMAGES FROM MASTER PHOTOGRAPHERS

Lou Jacobs Jr.

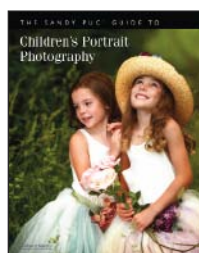
Veteran author and photographer Lou Jacobs Jr. interviews ten top portrait pros, sharing their secrets for success. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 150 color photos, index, order no. 2003.



EXISTING LIGHT

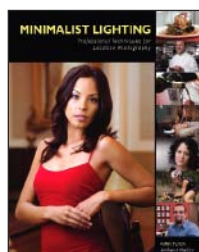
Bill Hurter

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SIMPLE LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

FOR PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHERS

Bill Hurter

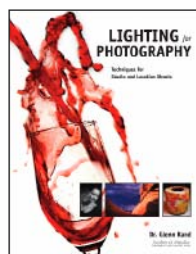
Make complicated lighting setups a thing of the past. In this book, you'll learn how to streamline your lighting for more efficient shoots and more natural-looking portraits. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color images, index, order no. 1864.



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LIGHTING FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Dr. Glenn Rand

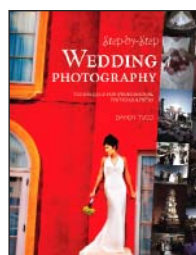
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Allison Earnest

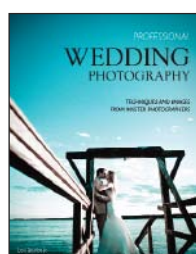
Learn how to design the lighting effect that will best flatter your subject. Studio and location lighting setups are covered in detail with an assortment of helpful variations provided for each shot. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color images, diagrams, index, order no. 1867.



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Deliver the the top-quality images your clients demand with the tips in this essential book. Tucci shows you how to become more creative, more efficient, and more successful. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color images, index, order no. 1868.



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Lou Jacobs Jr.

Jacobs explores techniques and images from over a dozen top professional wedding photographers in this revealing book, taking you behind the scenes and into the minds of the masters. \$34.95 list, 8.5x11, 128p, 175 color images, index, order no. 2004.



GET AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE WORLD OF JEWISH WEDDINGS AND LEARN HOW TO CREATE IMAGES THAT WILL THRILL YOUR CLIENTS

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FEATURES:

- Key elements of the Jewish wedding ceremony
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- Mastering the terms you may encounter
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- Planning your basic schedule for Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish weddings
- Working with brides, grooms, rabbis, families, and other key players
- Understanding the correct dress and demeanor for photographing Jewish weddings
- Photographing the kabalas panim, the tish, the ketubah, the tena'im, the badeken, the processional, the chuppah, sheva brachot, the hora, and more
- Creating formal portraits of the bride and groom, wedding party, and families
- Tips for photographing the reception events
- Wedding-album design techniques for Jewish weddings
- Answers to frequently asked questions about Jewish wedding photography

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